sparkle dark

Written by

Lance Mazmanian

Lance Mazmanian
note@mazmanian.net

“One of the most important of Abu al-Bīrūnī’s many texts is *Shadows*, which he’s thought to have written around 1021 AD. The contents of the work include the Arabic nomenclature of shade and shadow (strange phenomena involving applications of shadow functions to the astrolabe and to other instruments) and shadow observations for the solution of various astronomical problems. *Shadows* also contains important theories, such as the idea that acceleration is connected with non-uniform motion.”

– O’Connor and Robertson, c.1933

Sparkle Dark

FADE IN:

EXT. APARTMENTS - MORNING

Autumn, East St. Louis. Three story daily-weekly motel in the hopeless part of town with St. Louis Arch in the deep b.g.

INT. DAILY-WEEKLY - MORNING

Bleak and sparse, curtains drawn. Room lit with dim solar ambience. A silky silver robe hangs by a door hook.

A nude, attractive YOUNG WOMAN, 23, sits in the center of the room's single bed. She stares expressionless at the floor

This is Megan. Her hair is a mid-length Bettie Page/pixie hybrid, partly shaven with multicolored tips that look like blurry little rainbows. Her body is lean, svelte, muscular. Her shoulder blade, chest, and belly show inks of Arabic script. Her lip is double-pierced, left side, with a pair of spider bite rings. She wears two single horizontal strips of electrical tape, barely over her nipples.

There's a mini-fridge in a corner. On a chair nearby is a medium-size brown Teddy bear, ragged but cute.

Megan hears something outside. She's stoic as she moves to the window, carefully peeks out. She then walks to Teddy bear, pats his head, turns him around to face the wall. She returns to the door, puts her hand on the doorknob and waits.

A knock. She opens.

INT. DAILY-WEEKLY - LATER

Poorly rigged photographic bounce lights. A white CAMERA GUY, 34, snaps shots of Megan, who's completely nude on the bed with face mostly hidden by a Mardi Gras mask. Strobes flash, her poses are animal.

CAMERA GUY
Alright, on the knees.

Megan turns on all fours, arches toward Camera Guy. We see none of her nudity directly. Camera Guy gets a couple pix.

CAMERA GUY (CONT'D)
Okay.

Like a switch, Megan rises quite matter of factly, grabs the previous silk robe and puts it on, no expression at all.

She removes her mask and walks to the room's dresser table. As Camera Guy wraps, Megan stops to stare at herself in the dresser mirror. She clearly mouths the word "defiled" then opens a dresser drawer and pulls an old man's tobacco pipe. She taps the pipe's bowl, grabs a lighter and fires up.

Camera Guy, amused, pauses to watch Megan as she smokes the pipe. She gestures for payment.

CAMERA GUY (CONT'D)
Right.

He digs in a pocket, pulls a 100-dollar bill and tosses it on the dresser next to her. He walks back to his lights, puffs in a scholarly manner, flips him off behind his back.

INT. DAILY-WEEKLY - A LITTLE LATER

Devoid of emotion, Megan stands at the window puffing her pipe, a sliver of curtain pulled aside.

MEGAN'S POV: CAMERA GUY descends the outside stairs, encumbered with gear. BACK TO: MEGAN, who gently pulls the curtain closed. She returns the pipe to the dresser.

Her demeanor and expression dramatically change to joy and sunlight as she lovingly grabs Teddy bear, brings him to the bed. She pats his head and straightens his fur, etc.

MEGAN
Sorry that took so long. You didn't get bored, did you? I sure did.

She hugs the bear, smiling in bliss.

MEGAN (CONT'D)
I have to work soon. But I think we need a nap first, right? Right!

She curls to a fetal position with Teddy bear, and her face is happy. But like a song fading out, she gradually changes back to the cold emotion from before.

She pats the bear's head, then puts him to bed with his face turned away from her. She kisses him goodnight, then gets up and walks to the dresser.

She opens a drawer and pulls several items, and in the manner of a little girl, lines them up like a parade:

Spoon without handle, a tiny baggie with a lump of black-tar heroin, syringe, cotton ball, pack of cigarettes, lighter.

She takes the syringe and leaves scene for a couple beats. We hear the bathroom sink briefly run OS, she returns and preps her injection: Gear, spoon, water, cotton, fire. When done, she carefully sucks the heated heroin/water mix into the syringe, through a piece of cotton ball.

She examines it, places it gently on the dresser, pulls and lights a cigarette from her pack. She puffs hard, til the cherry is brilliantly bright red.

She lifts a section of hair away from her head, behind her ear and near her neck. Several tiny round scars are here and we find out why:

She presses the hot cherry of the cigarette against her exposed scalp, burning a small, glistening hole. She winces, but is otherwise amazingly controlled. Tears ebbing, she sticks the loaded syringe directly into the cigarette burn. She injects very slowly. Her eyes roll as she eases into the high. She pulls the syringe, gives the rig a light kiss, puts a cotton ball onto the cigarette wound and holds it there.

She’s in her bliss now, smiling and rocking a bit as if to unseen music. Her tears from the pain seem ignored as she walks backward to the bed and lightly flops onto her back.

INT. ST. LOUIS CITY BUS (MOVING) - AFTERNOON

A lightly populated city bus crosses the MLK bridge, steel beams flash the windows.

Megan is here, sitting alone near the back, now wearing an archetypical pink waitress outfit with a stylish but aged cardigan sweater over. She has a small, unusual purse in her lap, chews a wad of gum as she studies the world zipping by her window.

Megan observes everything with a curious and intelligent eye, alert, alive, but very calm. She pokes her window a couple times, as if pressing a button.

EXT. CITY BUS

The bus moves into the outskirts of St. Louis.

INT. CITY BUS - LATER

The bus makes a stop.

Megan prepares to exit when she sees on the street outside her window a PERSON dressed in an orange gorilla suit with pink cowboy hat and boots. The gorilla wears a sign that says “Killer Chicken” and crazily swings a giant fake chicken leg like a baseball bat. The gorilla turns in circles, generally goes apeshit.

Megan gasps in girlish wonder at the sight, then digs quickly in her purse for a little black & red notebook. She pulls it, scribbles a note while observing the gorilla.

But she detects something odd, slowly looks up to see an overweight UGLY BASTARD, 28, across the aisle. He stares at her, discreetly uses his hands to sign a pair of sex organs doing their thing.

Megan doesn’t take her eyes off him, gathers her stuff, moves to exit. She passes Ugly, stops, stares at him blankly. She then removes the wad of gum from her mouth and sticks it on Bastard’s head, smiles fakely.

There’s an isolated LAUGH from O.S., Megan casually exits.

EXT. OUTSKIRTS OF ST. LOUIS

Megan walks from the bus toward a blue and yellow building: DON’S ALLEY GRILLE & BOWLING - ITS (sic) ST. LOUIS FINEST. Before she enters, a solitary dandelion growing from a sidewalk crack catches her eye. She kneels, smiles at the little weed-flower.

INT. DON’S GRILLE & BOWLING

Megan enters the bowling alley with the dandelion she found, in her hair. The place bustles with PATRONS and their clamor.

INT. THE ALLEY GRILLE

An attached classic American greasy spoon, with odd attempts at color and pizzazz. Two blue collar FAT GUYS, one white and one black, early 40s, sit at the counter. They eat nasty double chili dogs and onion rings.

They see Megan, smile.

FAT GUY #1
Mariposa!

FAT GUY #2
There she is.

MEGAN
Hey, guys.
(sees chili dogs)
My, that is quite the zombie farmyard.

FAT GUY #2
Lookit veggie girl, here!

MEGAN
I love meat, actually. But I do prefer actual muscle tissue with my nostrils and eyelids.

FAT GUY #1
Oh, we're all about the eyelids.
(looks at a dog)
Hey, it's winkin' at cha.

MEGAN
Foolish eyelid.

Megan takes her place behind the counter, dons her wares, waves to DOLORE, 52, a chubby, severe-looking fellow waitress. Dolore comes forward, leans on the counter.

FAT GUY #2
Hey, Megan: Thought you worked nights on Tuesday?

MEGAN
Tuesday's tomorrow...?

FAT GUY #1
What's the matter with you, you don't know the day?!

FAT GUY #2
Up yours.

A smiling Megan wanders off to the back kitchen.

INT. ALLEY GRILLE EMPLOYEE AREA

Megan sits in a mini booth, starts digging through her purse. She produces her pipe, lights it, smokes. Dolore appears, smiles and shakes her head. Dolore then walks to an employee coffee machine: Urn's empty.

DOLORE
Dave, Goddammit, if ya use all the java, make some more, huh?!
(MORE)

DOLORE (CONT'D)
(to Megan, concerned)
How you doin', doll?

MEGAN
Me? Okay.

DOLORE
Yeah? Them church people came by again.

MEGAN
(silly face)
Don't worry, Dolore. Just listening. They kinda remind me of birds. Might be lizards, though.

DOLORE
Lizards? Child, you *are* a joker. Anyway, I don't put stock in nobody who don't pledge to the good ol' flag. And the blood thing? Hell with 'em.

MEGAN
But what if I'm the abandoned stepdaughter of Anne Rice?

Dolore rolls her eyes, tends the coffee.

DOLORE
My, my.

INT. ALLEY GRILLE - LATE AFTERNOON

Place is dead. Megan wipes a counter, pours coffee for an OLD BLACK MAN, 70-ish. In walks a tall, attractive blonde, DEBRA, 25, with BROTHER FERNANDEZ, 34, an Irish dude with a curly red fro. Looks like a familiar hamburger clown.

Debra and Fernandez wear their Sunday best, carry little satchels. Debra steps forward.

DEBRA
Hi, Megan.

MEGAN
Oh, hey, guys! Um, next Thursday's, like, 12,000 minutes away, or so?

DEBRA
Wow, that's a while. Can you sit with us, please? Brother Fernandez and I have a few questions.

Dolore approaches, arms crossed defiantly.

MEGAN
(to Dolore)
Mom, can I?
(whispers to Debra and Fernandez)
She's not *really* my mom.

Dolore scowls.

INT. ALLEY GRILLE BAR

Megan, Debra, and Fernandez sit at a bar near the grille. Megan smokes her oddball tobacco pipe. The place is hazy, dark, spotted with middle-aged DRINKERS.

MEGAN
Look, I really didn't expect all this *intensity* so soon. Vous comprenez? Plus, yeah...I'm not cool with God's name being tossed around like a coconut. "Hey, Jehovah!" See? Supposing, of course, that the he or she or *it* God really hangs around watching people in the shower and stuff. Anyway, the name thing: Presumptuous. Disrespectful.

Megan puffs and waits.

FERNANDEZ
Jehovah is God's name, Megan. He *wants* us to use it. It brings us closer to him.

MEGAN
Mm. Says you. Sorry, this whole thing is like a big, weirdo spooky maze. I keep waiting for, like, the Minotaur to jump out and hit me with a golden candlestick, or something.
(beat)
How often do you suppose a Minotaur takes a shower?

DEBRA
We understand, Megan. I think. Remember, though: Commitment to The Truth isn't easy. If it were——

MEGAN
(drags pipe, considers)
Well, as I haven't committed... Geez. I mean, okay, I really have to be honest: I only got involved because I think Debra's super cute. No, wait. And also——bear with me——because, waffle iron. Your cult is that. All cults are, really, but it adds up the same: Put brain into waffle iron, press down, psssssssst. New brain, new intellectual highway. Speed limit is really low, though. All GPS, no road. You see?

She makes O's with the forefinger and thumb of both hands, puts them to her face like a pair of silly glasses. Fernandez will have none of this shit.

FERNANDEZ
Jehovah's Witnesses aren't a waffle iron, Megan. And we're certainly not a cult. This is really disappointing.

MEGAN
(sincere)
Oh, I'm so sorry! I truly didn't mean to be insulting, or anything.

DEBRA
Megan, do you believe that, before Paradise Earth, this Worldly system of things will be swept away at Armageddon?

MEGAN
Mm. All twisted-up and burnt and smashed and stuff. And I'll be all by myself. On a little green hill somewhere. Watching it all go down. Kinda sounds like a hippie ballad, right? Cool concept, though.

Megan puffs; Fernandez and Debra exchange puzzled looks.

MEGAN (CONT'D)
You guys are fun.

DEBRA
I think Megan has the right heart. Just... Hm. We have our public meeting tonight.
(MORE)

DEBRA (CONT'D)
What if you came, Megan? It's a very loving environment, and all the sisters——

MEGAN
Okay, how shall I dress?

Debra and Fernandez smile hard.

EXT. MEGAN'S DAILY-WEEKLY COMPLEX - DUSK

Night approaches. A city bus pulls to a stop out front and Megan exits. She's cold, hurries up to her room.

INT. DAILY-WEEKLY

Megan enters, hits the single lamp. She quickly disrobes to undergarments, adjusts the heat, sprightly moves toward her Teddy bear. She hugs him, spins him around, puts him on the bed, snuggles next to him. They talk.

MEGAN
How's it goin', buddy?! So, those Jehovah's Witness people came back today. Wow, huh? Yeah, freaks, huh? And that Debra chick. She's just so terribly stupid. Stupido! Stupido! Yes, I know, normally I can't staaaand blondes, but she's very yummy-yummy, somehow. Anyway, I need to go soon. Wanna do some makeup with me? Cool!

Megan leaps up, rummages a drawer, grabs a bunch of makeup. She brings the goods to the bed, then drags a lamp from the dresser. She moves back to the drawer, finds a baggie of weed. Megan then grabs her "old man" tobacco pipe, bangs it empty on the dresser.

She fills it with herb, sparks, tokes deep. She looks over her shoulder, sees Teddy bear watching her. She immediately exhales, walks over, turns him away.

MEGAN (CONT'D)
You're still too little!

She walks back to the dresser, tokes again, exhales, pokes the pot smoke playfully with a rigid index finger. She then proceeds to kill all the lights.

Dark.

The light Megan brought from the dresser kicks on. She places it directly before her, aligns her reflection in the mirror. She then paints her eyes, lips, and right cheek with strange, garish streaks.

A unique artistic design occurs: Yellow, blue, white, purple. Little bear has a hairbrush in his arms, sits watching her.

A rude knock at the door. Megan freezes. Another. Megan is still. O.S. footsteps leave, Megan continues with her makeup.

EXT. SUBURBAN ST. LOUIS - NIGHT

A city bus pulls from the large parking lot entrance of Family Golf & Learning Center, a local driving range.

Megan stands there, dressed quasi digital hardcore—— complete with stripped hose and latex skirt. Her makeup, while theatrical, is beautifully executed.

She’s steeling herself to do something. After a couple beats she walks toward the driving range complex.

INT. FAMILY GOLF

Megan pays her fees to the silent gawk of COUNTER PERSONNEL. She grabs a 5-Iron and a bucket of balls, moves to the range.

EXT. DRIVING RANGE

Driving stalls and PEOPLE. Bleacher style lights wash the area with ballpark ambience.

Megan approaches from the b.g, arrives at her stall. She quickly sets up, gets her stance down, lines the shot, swings. Her ball sails cleanly and expertly through the air.

Satisfied, she tees a second ball, lines, swings. Another great one.

MEGAN
I’d say that works.

She continues.

EXT. BAD PART OF TOWN - NIGHT

The hood. Nobody around, mostly empty commercial structures. LED bank clock in the b.g. reads 2:14 AM.

Megan walks, puffs her pipe. She's absorbed in the study of buildings and shadows. She stops, sits, pulls her black and red notebook. She scribbles something, puts the notebook away and walks off.

A police cruiser appears, rolls quietly and slowly by, two OFFICERS inside.

The passenger side sees Megan smoking the pipe. The cruiser pulls up to Megan and stops. She stops as well, fearlessly scans the guys. Officer #1 exists the car with active flashlight. Megan isn't the least uncomfortable.

OFFICER #1
You okay, miss?

MEGAN
Yes, officer, something like that.

OFFICER #1
What's in the pipe?

MEGAN
That's a secret. Home blend, you know.

Officer #1 approaches her, puts his hand out.

OFFICER #1
May I?

She complies, Officer #1 takes the pipe, seems confused by the pipe's dated, geriatric design. The officer puts the bowl under his flashlight, looks it over.

OFFICER #1 (CONT'D)
Kinda old school.

MEGAN
It's my dad's.

OFFICER #1
Yeah? Where's dad now?

Megan points to the sky, then mimes a person sleeping. The officer smells the bowl. He hands the pipe back, smiles.

OFFICER #1 (CONT'D)
So, where you going?

MEGAN
Here. Maybe there.

OFFICER
With your dad’s pipe?

MEGAN
Well, it’s not as if his ashes are in it.
(bats her eyes)

OFFICER #1
No, but I do smell a little weed in there. Listen: Be careful out here. Not the best area.

MEGAN
I promise I won’t hurt anyone.

The Officer smiles again, gets back in his rig. The cruiser pulls away.

Megan continues her walk, unfazed. She hikes past an old, possibly condemned building, lightly whistles The Police tune “Walking on the Moon”. She stands on her tiptoes, peers into the structure. Mostly darkness, but she sees some VAGRANTS lying about.

She returns to the front of the building, finds a door.

INT. CONDEMNED BUILDING

Still whistling, Megan scans around. The place is filled with trash, broken-up furniture, vermin. She passes three vagrants sleeping head-to-shoulder, holds her nose.

Megan moves down a corridor to a little room where a small fire burns. An UNCONSCIOUS VAGRANT lies near the fire, his bottle of Popov vodka almost empty and still in hand.

Megan enters. Light and shadow reflect every direction. She sits before the small fire, warms herself. From a far corner, a black Labrador raises its head to observe her. Megan smiles at the dog. It rests its head on paws, watches.

Megan yawns, crawls to the sleeping vagrant’s side, really looks him over. She holds her nose for a second, then carefully removes the Popov from his hand. She swigs the remains of the vodka, puts the bottle aside.

She produces her black & red notebook, scribbles for a few beats. She puts the notebook away, lies down in an open spot near the vagrant.

She curls to fetal, is quickly asleep.

EXT. ST. LOUIS SKYLINE - DAWN

Break of day through buildings.

EXT. DAILY-WEEKLY - EARLY MORNING

A city bus pulls from the curb, reveals a rumpled Megan. She looks around, walks briskly toward her daily-weekly.

EXT./INT. DAILY-WEEKLY

Megan enters her chambers. She closes the door and immediately greets Teddy bear with customary hug and spin. She then disrobes to undergarments, removes her lip rings.

She rummages, finds two quarters. She moves back to the door with them, opens, looks around, sees what she's looking for: A rolled, delivered newspaper near a neighbor.

EXT. DAILY-WEEKLY CORRIDOR

Megan exits her room, glides one door down and mischievously steals the neighbor's paper. She leaves the quarters in its place. She slinks back toward her room, the same time as a scraggly OLD GUY in trenchcoat and derby laboriously ascends the stairs in front of her. Off guard, Megan stops.

Old Guy stops too, stares at Megan who stands before him in the colored glow of morning like a nearly nude vision. She grandly points the paper at the old guy, like a sword.

MEGAN
Fiat Lux!

She does a theatrical curtsey, then backs up to her room. She smiles and waves at the old guy, closes the door.

INT. DAILY-WEEKLY

Megan tosses the newspaper on the bed. She quickly goes to the mini-refrigerator, pulls a nutrition shake. She moves back toward the bed, stops in front of her dresser mirror.

She thinks a moment, puts the shake on the dresser, opens a drawer and pulls a bright yellow lipstick. With it, she writes on the dresser mirror: SPIRITUS MUNDI. The "I's" aren't dotted, but topped with fun circles. She's pleased.

Megan grabs the nutrition shake, animatedly jumps back on the bed, opens the shake.

She snuggles Teddy bear beside her, drinks, flops the newspaper to the editorial section. She and the bear read intently for a couple beats.

There's a POUNDING KNOCK on the door. Megan freezes. The knock comes again, and then...

WINNIE (O.S.)
Girl, you best *open* this door!

Megan goes and peeks from the curtain, see a large, impatient-looking black woman, WINNIE, 30. Life's been hard for her by appearance, including a badly chipped front tooth.

Winnie sees Megan, points and wags her index finger. Megan opens the door, Winnie saunters in, Megan closes the door.

WINNIE (CONT'D)
You need to get a damn cell phone. Ain't the 80s, Little M.

MEGAN
Hate cellphones. And ringers.

WINNIE
Strange, strange.

Winnie opens a cupboard, Megan is pensive. Cupboard's mostly empty save for a large box of Saltines.

Winnie grabs and digs into the box, eats.

MEGAN
So, what's up?

WINNIE
Got some business with ya. Hey, you ever hear from that lawyer dude? He def wanted some Megan.

MEGAN
Yeah. For about a nanosecond I thought he was more than just a 35 year-old asshole who got stuck in a dead life and pegged me as a cock target, safely outside his bland sphere of wife and friends, who would thus remain invisible til he needed a discharge. Fuck him.

WINNIE
Yeah, all that? You lay him, anyway?

MEGAN
Offensive. But to answer your question, I might have, just for the conquest. Or, as an act of mercy. He was married, though. I don't eat from the floor.

WINNIE
Married ain't nothin'.

MEGAN
No, thanks. So, hope what you've got isn't what I think it is.

WINNIE
It is. Guadalupe want that money back. *Today*.

Megan considers what she's heard, walks a few feet to her bathroom. She enters, sits to use the toilet.

MEGAN
Jesus Tits, that guy. Tell him he can suck my dick.

WINNIE
Girl, he shoot you right now, he hear you diss him like that!

MEGAN
Oh, fuck him and his Donkey Kong-lookin' ass. In what world did ten-thousand that someone *else* stole become my fault?

WINNIE
Guad say you owe it. Things changin' fast in the Lou, Little M. Guad takin' it up. You play in his game, you gotta move those feet.

Megan flushes in the b.g, then emerges wearing her robe.

MEGAN
Does "up" means his own people can steal his money? And the party *delivering* said money——myself in this case——is somehow responsible?

WINNIE
I hear ya. Anyway, you take care of some biz for the boy? You clear. Paid in full. You ready?
(Megan is ready)
(MORE)

WINNIE (CONT'D)
Dude up in County. Boy's a prison guard. Been fuckin' up Guadalupe's game, big time. Can't move nothin' in there, with that motherfucker. Finds it all. And you gonna end it.

MEGAN
A lively accordion solo when the linen drops? That'll do it.

WINNIE
No, you gonna shoot the fool. Dead.

MEGAN
(laughs)
Oh, really? Fuck that. I don't kill people, Winnie. Jesus.

WINNIE
You already done killed that one dude. Second time ain't shit.

Megan visibly goes a little blank. She quickly re-routes.

MEGAN
Look, that was bullshit. Total garlic story. Keeps the bad people away, that's all.

WINNIE
Oops! It worked! Everybody around here thank you a little badass. Now you say it's some bullshit?

MEGAN
Yes. I do.

WINNIE
(serious)
Done playin'. He gonna kill you, girl. He pissed as hell you lost the money, and he damn well pissed you never said sorry. Shit's real. So I'm just tellin' ya.

MEGAN
A regular Montjoy.

WINNIE
Who? Anyway, you better get with it, you wanna stay alive.

Long beats of silence. And then...

MEGAN
Tell him yes.

WINNIE
See! Easy. I knew it. Walk all the damn way over here for this shit. Got me some crackers, though.
(laughs)

Winnie puts her fist out, and they do a quick bump to seal it. Megan seems less than happy about affairs.

Winnie walks to the door, opens, speaks as she exits.

WINNIE (CONT'D)
You be good, now, Little M. Appreciate ya.

Megan glares at Winnie as the door closes. Winnie stomps down the exterior stairs. Megan seems dazed, confused. She sits, thinks deeply about what's gone down. She puts her hands over her face, shakes her head repeatedly.

EXT. CITY STREETS - AFTERNOON

Busy and dirty. Megan at an antiquated payphone while cars and trucks pass by. She's dressed down.

MEGAN
Sure, yeah. Tell him it's Megan.

She waits, sees a WOMAN AND A SMALL CHILD walking from a corner grocer. The kid has a popsicle. Megan smiles.

MEGAN (CONT'D)
Yeah. Hey, Guadalupe. It's me.

INT./EXT. SMALL HOUSE BY THE RIVER (INTERCUTS)

Depressing shanty. A sinister, sweaty Hispanic guy, GUADALUPE (looks a lot like a young Luis Guzmán) talks on a wireless landline. Several noisy KIDS romp in the b.g. The house is unkempt and cluttered.

GUAD
Well, well, well. Little Mariposa. How you doing, Mariposa?

MEGAN
Could you not call me that, please?

GUAD
That’s your nickname, ain’t it?

MEGAN
Yeah, but I’m the only one allowed to use it.

GUAD
Whoa, now. We cool! So, you got my money?

MEGAN
Nope.

GUAD
Then you know what you gotta do.

MEGAN
Yep.

GUAD
You ain’t gonna fuck me on this, right?

MEGAN
Nope.

GUAD
That’s good. You’ll keep breathing that way. It’s good to breathe, right? I like to breathe, myself.

MEGAN
Funny.

GUAD
It ain’t fucking funny. Come by in a couple hours. We’ll have some menudo. Work out a plan. You like menudo, right?

MEGAN
I don’t think so.

GUAD
You’ll like it. Be here, got it?

MEGAN
Yep.

GUAD
Cool. Okay, then.

Guad kills the call. Megan replaces the receiver, stares at the phone.

EXT. ST. LOUIS - MID-AFTERNOON

Reverse fly-by of St. Louis and the Mississippi river.

INT. GUAD'S SHACK

Crying kids, cooking, chaos. Front door is open, Winnie is here with Guad. Megan hesitantly appears in the open doorway. She enters and stops.

GUAD
Yo, guest of honor!
(gestures sharply)
Outside.

EXT. MISSISSIPPI RIVERBANK

Megan, Guad, and Winnie stand on a shore near some trees, Guad's house in the b.g.

Guad puffs a doobie; he passes it around til end of scene.

GUAD
Anyway, he always leaves Charley's about ten o'clock.

MEGAN
Charley's?

GUAD
You know, Charley's. That bar what had a fire on the pool table that one time.
(wags finger at river)
One day I'm gonna own this river here. No, no, now, I mean it. Own it. Straight out.

WINNIE
Who gonna sell you that river?

GUAD
Everything's for sale, baby. Every motherfuckin' thing.

MEGAN
So, Charley's? And the guy?

GUAD
Wait a minute.

Guad seems to go into some sort of trance: He closes his eyes, holds his hands at the side of his head.

GUAD (CONT'D)
Yeah, baby.
(beat)
Sugar, you know daddy loves you!
(opens his eyes)
Charley's, yeah. Where were we?

MEGAN
He leaves at ten?

GUAD
Yeah, so I been watchin' this dude. He walks out, goes all the way around back and down the alley. Every fuckin' night he does this same shit, and I finally figured it out: His old lady works the newsstand on the corner! Gets off around 11. Guess she don't know about his happy liquor time.

MEGAN
Funny.

GUAD
It ain't fuckin' funny. So, what you do is take this.

He produces a .25 Raven snub-nose pistol with dirty white canvas tape around the grip.

MEGAN
In an echoey alley. Because, you know, no one's possibly going to notice the sound of a gunshot from five blocks away.

Guad pulls a very homemade-looking noise suppressor (silencer) from his pocket, hold it up like a magician.

WINNIE
Smoooove.

Guad screws the silencer onto the pistol. It looks odd.

GUAD
Now: Mr. Prison Guard motherfucker walks...lemme see, west into that alley. Right there is a dumpster, a big ugly red bitch. So, when he passes by, you just come out from behind the can, zap him one time clean, at the base of the skull. Get that bullet to bounce all up and down inside his stupid fuckin' head. And that's it.

Megan takes the Raven, examines it. She grips the weapon in a better than average palm-over-palm.

She takes a stance, aims at a passing boat, follows for a second or two. She's aggressive, confident.

She turns suddenly, tracks a DOG walking nearby.

GUAD (CONT'D)
Don't you shoot Huey, now.

Megan turns the weapon on Guad. He doesn't flinch at all.

GUAD (CONT'D)
(smiles wide)
Yes, ma'am! Dialed!

Guad reaches for the weapon, Megan gives it, grip first.

GUAD (CONT'D)
I'd do this myself, you know, because I do like killing people, I really do. But this way you can be a respectable citizen and honor your debts incurred. And I can stay home and look at naked magazines.

Guad cocks the pistol, un-cocks it, then cocks again. He looks at Megan, scowls, thinks. He raises the pistol to his eyeline in a hand-over stance, aims at the river.

Guad looks challengingly at Megan, casually turns, aims at Huey the dog, fires. A hit. The dog screams horribly (his wound and pain occur O.C.: WE SEE nothing).

MEGAN
(pissed)
The fuck?!

More wails of agony from the dog. Guad approaches Megan, gets right in her face. Megan doesn't back down. Staring match. Finally, Guad nods his respect, smiles wide.

He turns, aims, quickly fires twice. The dog goes quiet. Again, we SEE nothing of it.

GUAD
You got any questions?

Megan's pissed about the dog.

MEGAN
Maybe I should know what the guy looks like?

GUAD
Big black dude. Bald head. Always wears one of them funny African hats. You know, them flat ones.

MEGAN
They're called "Kofia".

GUAD
Whatever. Fuckin' hat, alright?

Guad gives the gun to Megan, grip first. She takes it.

GUAD (CONT'D)
Okay, then, ladies! Outtasight! Tooo-night is the night! Excellento. Now get the hell outta here before I change my mind.

He walks over, puts his hand on Megan's shoulder.

GUAD (CONT'D)
You fuck this up, I'm comin' for the ovaries, I shit you not.

MEGAN
I'll keep it in mind. Asshole.

Guad laughs his ass off.

INT. DAILY-WEEKLY - NIGHT

Megan showers. Baptism.

INT. DAILY-WEEKLY

Pipe in mouth, Megan wears her silvery robe, looks sort of Mata Hari. She has the .25 in hand with silencer attached, feigns pistol stances around the room, into the mirror, etc.

After a bit of this she stops, examines herself in the dresser mirror. Her hands slowly drop to her side, but she doesn't break the stare into her own eyes. The pistol slips from her fingers, clunks to the floor.

She moves to the dresser, opens the top drawer and extracts the heroin goods. However, she's losing her cool: Hands shaking, movements imprecise, anger.

She fumblingly lights a cigarette, leaves it on the dresser. It scorches the wood as she then tries to assemble a hit from the gear. In a sudden blind rage she sloppily knocks almost everything off the dresser but the cigarette and some random toiletry bottles.

One bottle overturns, pours a pool of liquid on the dresser.

Megan covers her eyes, tries to contain. She releases, grabs the cigarette and takes a drag. She stares at herself, with loathing. She flicks the cigarette at her own reflection. It bounces off the mirror and into the spilled liquid. The liquid burns, a gentle, strangely colored pool of inch-high flames. She barely acknowledges the fire, which has created a strange green/blue glow in the room.

Megan becomes all business as she pulls a cover from the bed and plops it on the dresser, killing the fire. She looks at herself again, straightens her hair slightly.

She sees Teddy bear in a corner of the mirror, turns and goes to him. She picks him up, hugs him, sits down.

MEGAN
I'm sorry you had to see that. It won't happen again. Promise.

She closes her eyes, keeps Teddy tight. Tears are pouring, but her expression stays constant.

EXT. DAILY-WEEKLY - NIGHT

It's lovely and clear. Megan is outside on the railing that overlooks the parking lot, now dressed for the evening. She's in no-bullshit mode, all biz and dialed. She wears an extra-fuzzy black turtleneck sweater and black slacks, with black and purple mascara, black lipstick. She puffs a cigarette.

INT. DAILY-WEEKLY - NIGHT

Megan sits on the bed, stares at the room phone in front of her. She thinks, picks up, dials. A couple rings, then...

WOMAN (V.O.)
Manning residence.
(beat)
Hello?
(couple beats)
Lysa? Honey?

MEGAN
(struggling)
Mom?

Megan chokes up, slams the phone down.

She holds her hand there a moment. She stands, goes to Teddy bear and gives him a quick kiss.

She takes the pistol, stashes it into a stylish black leather backpack. With a final look in the mirror, she leaves.

EXT. ALLEY GRILLE - NIGHT

A city bus pulls away, reveals Megan standing there, staring at the Alley Grille sign like a monolith. She calms herself.

INT. ALLEY GRILLE

Megan enters, dread all over her. Dolore hangs an order on the cook wheel, sees Megan.

DOLORE
Watch fast? You still got an hour.

MEGAN
Can we talk?

Dolore no like.

INT. ALLEY GRILLE

In a closed back section, Dolore and Megan sit facing one-another in a booth against a big window. Dolore gives Megan the evil eye over their coffee cups and cigarettes.

MEGAN
I know the way things look, Dolore.
But it’s not quite what you think.

DOLORE
No? What the hell is it, then? You need help, kiddo.
(MORE)

DOLORE (CONT'D)
You gotta wake up. You're on a bad road, and you know it.

MEGAN
Oh, Dolore.

DOLORE
Don't "Oh, Dolore" me! You're makin' a real big mistake if you think the low life is fun and games, darlin'. Believe me, I know.

MEGAN
My environment is chosen. It is. I'm fine.

DOLORE
I don't know what that even means. Fine? Bullshit. You got a taste for the night, child. It's gonna suck your soul in a Philly minute.

MEGAN
I'm in control, Dolore. I am.

DOLORE
So smart, ain't ya? Thought I was, too. We all do. You'll think different someday. If you make it.

MEGAN
My coffee's cold.

DOLORE
I got a few secrets m'self, y'know. You'd be surprised. Thank God for Dave or I'd be in a box sure as you're sittin' there.

MEGAN
Listen, I love your concern. It's sweet, and sincere. But I'll be sparklingly fine. Really.

DOLORE
You gotta start livin' right, doll. Life's short, believe me. POOF and it's gone!

MEGAN
Oh, I know. See, my dad was murdered. I know all about "poof".

Megan stares at Dolore for a beat, then breaks her gaze and turns to the window, looks through to the middle distance.

One stunned Dolore. A long pause.

DOLORE
Sorry, babe, I never knew about——

MEGAN
Shhh. Don't worry so much! Wait, scratch that.

Megan points toward the front register. There stands DAVE, a chubby, hard-looking man of 55 in standard kitchen garb. He's got a stogie in his mouth.

DAVE
You gonna leave the money sit in the register all night, or what?

DOLORE
Hey, cut the Gestapo shit, willya?

Dave waves a dismissive hand toward Dolore, walks back to the kitchen. Megan giggles.

DOLORE (CONT'D)
Think about what I told ya. And don't worry about tonight. Just be here tomorrow for damned sure, or Dave's gonna shit.
(gets up)
Do what's right, Megan.

Dolore walks away. Megan watches her and twiddles her thumbs nervously. Megan looks out the diner window, stares at the passing of cars. She touches the window with an index finger, finds it very cold. She breathes on the pane, fogging a small section. She then quickly traces what appears to be a cartoon butterfly, with a big smiley face.

EXT. DARK CITY STREET - NIGHT

A cab slowly pulls to a curb. There's a couple beats as a passenger pays in silhouette, makes an exit. It's Megan. She watches the cab drive away, waits til it's gone. She checks her watch, walks off.

EXT. ALLEY

Long, forbidding, echoey. Megan appears, takes cautious steps. She's on full alert, does her best to remain unseen.

A trio of noisy COLLEGE KIDS enter the alley. She moves to the shadows, checks her watch: 9:56. She reaches back, pulls the .25 from her backpack and then the silencer, which she screws into place.

Megan sees the red dumpster. A sign nearby reads: CHARLEY'S PARKING AROUND CORNER.

She carefully moves out...until a garbage truck bursts into the alley. She slinks against a wall, crouches behind some milk crates, observes. The truck stops, a black GARBAGE MAN jumps off the truck's runner and proceeds to struggle with the large red dumpster. He can't move it. He curses, AD LIBs a shout to the WHITE GARBAGE TRUCK DRIVER to give a hand.

The driver jumps down, they wrestle the dumpster together. Megan watches, anxiety growing.

From around the dumpster a large BALD BLACK DUDE appears, wearing colorful African Kofia cap. It's her prison guard, for sure. The man walks around the garbage guys, stops, holds a finger to one nostril, blows the contents of the other.

Megan moves in behind him, conscious of the garbage crew. She follows her prey til the garbage guys seem out of sight, then prepares herself.

But her quarry is gone. Megan freaks, looks all around. She hears footfalls, runs that direction. She slides around a corner, and there he is...taking a leak on some trash bags.

Megan creeps up behind him. The way she handles the gun is definitely not amateur level.

She levels the pistol, lines the silencer muzzle with the base of the man's skull. She slightly squeezes the trigger...

But freezes. She holds there, the dude's urine spreads in a pool around her shoes. He shakes off, shambles on his way, none the wiser.

She lowers the pistol. Beat. She stands there motionless, head lowered, pistol arm limp. Her body shakes as she starts to sob.

Like before, it's powerful, uncontrolled. Enraged, she throws the pistol away. It smashes into some cans, bounces back toward her. She kicks it, grabs a garbage can and crazily brings it down on the pistol, with both hands. It's having no effect at all, of course.

She finally collects herself, wipes her tears.

MEGAN
That's it. That's fucking *it*.

She bends down to grab the pistol when she hears something behind her. Still crouched, she turns around. It's Winnie.

Megan is truly surprised. And Winnie looks mean. Winnie's right hand is against her hip, clumsily concealing something.

WINNIE
The fuck was that?!

MEGAN
Why are you here?

WINNIE
Never the fuck mind about that. You suppose'a smoke that dude, bitch.

MEGAN
Bitch?! Look, this was——

A barely perceptible glint flashes from Winnie's right hand. Megan expertly and immediately scoops-up the .25, points it directly at Winnie's face.

MEGAN (CONT'D)
Drop it. Now.

WINNIE
Ho, you ain't got the nerve.

MEGAN
(cocks the .25)
Drop it or I'll fucking kill you.

Winnie can't decide, but then lets the un-silenced snub .357 drop from her hand. It clicks to the ground.

MEGAN (CONT'D)
Hands on your head.

Winnie complies, reluctantly.

MEGAN (CONT'D)
On your knees.

WINNIE
Bitch, I ain't gettin' on my knees for nobody, 'specially no skanky ho like your mom made.

MEGAN
I won't ask again.

WINNIE
I ain't! So what you gonna do?
Shoot? I been shot, ain't no thang.

Winnie steps forward. Megan takes a very quick second to calmly and precisely aim, then fires. The bullet clips Winnie's right ear, the silenced weapon makes a chug sound, is otherwise quiet.

Winnie yowls, AD LIB curses.

MEGAN
Knees.

WINNIE
(dropping)
You dead, ho. Dead as shit.

Megan cocks the pistol, keeps it trained on Winnie's head.

MEGAN
We're all dead.

Megan walks backward away from Winnie. She gets to the street, hauls-ass away. Winnie bolts to her feet, yanks her cellular, dials.

EXT. DAILY-WEEKLY - NIGHT - LATER

Megan takes the stairs in double steps, gets to her room.

INT. DAILY-WEEKLY

Megan closes and locks the door, frantically gathers some belongings. She stashes as much as she can, as fast as she can, into her backpack.

She zooms around the room, comes to Teddy bear. She looks at him, stops to give him a long hug.

MEGAN
Don't be scared. We'll be gone
soon.

She finds her father's pipe, tucks it into a pocket, continues her packing.

A car door slams O.S. Megan darts to the window curtains and sees, downstairs, a lowered Chevy depositing two BAD-ASSED MEXICANS, a MEAN BASTARD WHITE DUDE, and one seriously pissed-off Guad.

Megan acts quick, kills the lights. She puts her backpack on, gets the pistol in hand, runs and turns the bathroom light on. She closes the bathroom door, but leaves it slightly ajar, then springs underneath the dresser.

She curls to a ball, hides in the space where a chair would normally go.

Footsteps approach O.S. There's a mean knock.

GUAD (O.S.)
Okay, girl, we saw the lights and now they're off, so stop bullshitting around. You'll just make it worse, I promise.

EXT./INT. DAILY-WEEKLY

Guad motions to one of his boys. The guy brings a crowbar to bear. He's about to torque it when Guad steps up.

GUAD
Lemme do it.

Guad applies the necessary crowbar pressure: Megan's door tears against itself, thrashing wood around both locks. Guad completes the deal by kicking the locks hard.

The door flies open, Guad pulls a Glock 9mm, scans the room. He enters.

INT. DAILY-WEEKLY

Dark. Guad's guys enter behind him. Guad sees the bathroom door ajar, points and motions his guys forward.

Unseen, Megan sits behind the trio, ready but quite vulnerable. Her POV shifts to Teddy bear, now dangerously out of reach.

Guad and crew move away, toward the bathroom. Guad's boys assemble at either side of its door.

GUAD
(whispering)
When I say, you putos rush in. I'll hold back in case she runs.

BAD-ASSED MEXICAN #1
What if she's got the gun, esé?

GUAD
Duck. Alright, you ready? Go!

Guad's boys slam the bathroom door nearly off the hinges, Guad rushes in. No Megan. There's a sound O.S., from the living room. Guad turns, leaps back to the living area...in time to see Megan's shadow leave the front entrance.

EXT. DAILY-WEEKLY CORRIDORS (VARIOUS)

Megan sprints away from her room, Teddy bear in hand. Guad appears, drops to one knee, aims his piece, fires. Sparks flare ahead of Megan, but she doesn't stop.

Guad's boys join him. Guad silently points the two bad-ass Mexicans around the other side of the building. They go. Guad points the white dude downstairs and forward. He goes. Guad himself runs directly after Megan, who's now turned a corner.

Megan looks around to get her bearings. She stuffs Teddy bear under a strap of the backpack, straddles the third story handrail, eases her body down, carefully climbs onto the second floor handrail.

With a snake-like twist, she drops herself into the second floor corridor. She runs stealthily the opposite direction. Guad's ground guy doesn't see: he's in the first story corridor, beneath her.

Various TENANTS have emerged, wondering what's on as Megan finds the stairs down, quickly leaps to the first floor and flies across the parking lot. Neither Guad nor his boys are near, so she takes a second, examines their Chevy. She looks inside, sees keys dangling from the steering column.

EXT. DAILY-WEEKLY CORRIDOR

Guad hugs a wall, turns into the corridor where Megan dropped: Nothing.

GUAD
Shit. Hector! Yo!

Guad hears a motor gun O.S., turns in time to see his car drive from the lot and down the street...in a leisurely fashion. Guad can only stare. But then he's pissed.

GUAD (CONT'D)
Chupo, you stupid bitch! You left the keys in the fuckin' steering wheel again!

CHUPO (O.S.)
I didn't!

GUAD
Well, she's driving down the street.

CHUPO (O.S.)
Can't be, esé!

GUAD
Okay, whatever you say.

Guad sits on the ground, pulls and lights a cigarette, shakes his head.

EXT. ST. LOUIS STREETS - NIGHT

Megan cruises in the Chevy. She lights a cigarette, her Teddy bear in the seat beside her...with seatbelt on.

Megan truly enjoys all this, and the night air becomes a friend as she makes way across the 64/55 bridge.

EXT. SELF-SERVE CAR WASH - NIGHT

Near a mix of residential and commercial properties, Megan pilots Guad's car to an empty, self-serve car wash. She guides the car to a stall.

EXT. SELF-SERVE CAR WASH - NIGHT - LATER

A mangy MEAN-EYED CAT slinks quickly from stall to stall. He probes about, sees and hears something. He stares for a second, bolts away.

In one of the stalls WE SEE Guad's car, windows up. Megan left a spray-gun running inside the car, its hose sticks from the driver-side door. The interior of Guad's car is flooded past the windows, with suds and water.

EXT. DOWNTOWN TRAIN YARD - NIGHT

Carrying Teddy bear by an arm, Megan casually walks between multiple tracks. On she goes.

EXT. TRAIN TRACKS

There's a train beside Megan, moving very slowly the opposite direction. A brightly-lit callplate says "No. 2187".

Megan extends her free hand, brushes the passing compartments. The train's passage bathes her in rhythmic light. Megan is fascinated by this, watches the light paint her hand.

The train continues by, its caboose now upon her. The train's horn cries through the gloom as Megan makes a sudden lunge, runs for the caboose. She catches it easily, cat-steps up the rear gangway, moves near the bay window door, out of sight.

She peeks in, sees a rail thin CREWMAN, 54, who cooks water for his coffee. Looks a bit like Tim Blake Nelson. The caboose innards are sparse, utilitarian. Megan turns, props Teddy bear on the rail beside her.

They watch St. Louis fade.

EXT. SNOWY PASS - MORNING

With icy sparkles, the train moves through a snow-covered hillscape, clear skies blazing.

INT./EXT. CABOOSE

In the caboose, the skinny crewman walks to the same bay window Megan had peeked through the night before. The crewman wipes frost, dons his cap, opens the door, steps out to the platform. He lights a cigarette, looks out over the beauty.

He looks down, and there's Megan—— smiling weakly, cuddling Teddy bear, obviously quite cold.

INT. CABOOSE SHOWER

In the steam of a tiny shower stall, Megan washes herself, savors the spray. She rinses her hair, cuts the water.

INT. CABOOSE

The caboose inner-dimension is cramped and confined, like a small travel trailer. The bathroom and bedroom area are separated by a short hall and a curtain on a rod.

In the main caboose area, a more “autumn-esque” landscape speeds through the windows as the crewman stirs soup on a built-in stove. He hears Megan pull the shower curtain.

CREWMAN
Bet you feel better now.

MEGAN (O.S.)
Like a ruby cut fresh.

He smiles. She exits the bathroom, wrapped in a towel and drying her hair with another.

MEGAN (CONT’D)
Warm in here, with just a kiss of cold.

CREWMAN
Good that way. Here, now.

He pours some soup, Megan peeks through the bunk curtains and observes eagerly, if not comically.

MEGAN
Mmmmm!

Megan closes the curtain, sits on the crewman’s bunk, notices an undersized super black cat watching from a pillow. The cat is incredibly cute, with luminous yellow-green eyes.

MEGAN (CONT’D)
Hey, you! Where’d you come from?!

She gives some love, the cat responds affectionately.

CREWMAN
That’s Isis. She never did grow too much, for some reason.

Megan kisses the cat on the head, drops her towel and quickly slips back into clothes, minus her undergarment, which she rolls and puts in a pocket.

MEGAN
Might be right for her, though. And one assumes she’s of course named for the brilliant Egyptian goddess, the sister/wife of Osiris, no less?

CREWMAN
(chuckles)
Yes, that’s right.

Megan gets her sweater back in place, exits.

INT. CABOOSE KITCHEN

The crewman has soup ready. Megan sits, Isis trots from under the bunk area curtain, makes a beeline for Megan's lap.

CREWMAN
Now, Isis, this ain't no place for you. Git!

Megan sticks her tongue out at the crewman, situates Isis so she's sitting directly beside her on the little chair.

MEGAN
I really, really can't thank you enough, my friend.

CREWMAN
Couldn't just leave you there.

MEGAN
Why not?
(she tastes the soup)
Oh my God, yum!
(beat)
Never been in a caboose before. Not that I remember, anyway.

CREWMAN
Very few left, these days. Sure is a welcome sight after twelve hard ones up front.
(beat)
So, trouble with the law, or...?

MEGAN
Mmmm, not quite. Is that ginger?

CREWMAN
Nice, huh?

MEGAN
Unexpected.

She continues her meal, the crewman observes with a concerned, fatherly curiosity.

CREWMAN
Is it hard to eat like that? With the piercings, I mean.

MEGAN
Mmm, no. In fact, if I pull them out, it's like I went away and left the oven on. Does that make sense?

CREWMAN
A little. Well, anyway, we're gonna have to get you out of here. Where you headed?

MEGAN
Where we stopping?

CREWMAN
Chicago's next.

MEGAN
I'd say that works.

CREWMAN
Any old harbor, huh?

MEGAN
Kinda. You married?

CREWMAN
Nope, never married.

MEGAN
And why's that?

CREWMAN
Never found the right fit, I guess.

MEGAN
Maybe you did, and didn't know it.

She continues with the soup, he watches.

CREWMAN
You live in St. Louis?

MEGAN
(silly French accent)
Monsieur President, I am a woman of the world!

CREWMAN
(chuckles)
I see. Well, maybe I could spare you a couple dollars for a bus home. Don't matter where.

MEGAN
Not necessary. I can do battle with the best of 'em.

CREWMAN
Sounds kinda hard.

MEGAN
(big smile)
That's okay. I *deserve* it.

The crewman doesn't know what to make of that. He gives her a deep look, like trying to find something. Megan stops eating, stops everything. And then she stands, walks to the crewman.

MEGAN (CONT'D)
I do so appreciate your kindness.

She very lightly and sweetly kisses him on the cheek.

CREWMAN
Hell, I just didn't want you freeze.

MEGAN
I wouldn't of. I had my bear.
(beat)
You're a good man. I can tell these things, you know.

CREWMAN
Oh? How so?

MEGAN
I can hear the light from the clouds.

Megan moves back to her chair, puts Isis on her lap, ruffles the cat's fur.

EXT. UNION STATION, CHICAGO - DAY

SUPER: Union Station, Chicago

The 2187 pulls slowly through a busy switching yard.

INT./EXT. CABOOSE

Teddy bear in hand, Megan prepares to debark. The crewman stands with Isis in his arms.

CREWMAN
Looks like now's the time.

Megan steps up. She offers her free hand to the crewman. They shake in a masculine manner.

MEGAN
Much obliged, partner!

CREWMAN
You take care, now.

He opens the door for her. She walks to the gangway, steps down. She looks back, then returns to rub Isis “goodbye”.

MEGAN
I’m gonna miss you!

She smiles at the crewman, returns to the gangway.

MEGAN (CONT’D)
(to crewman)
And you, too. Au revoir!

She does a brief little hop-jump, and is off the train. From the tracks she waves warmly to the crewman, he waves back.

EXT. CHICAGO CITY STREETS - DAY (VARIOUS) - LATER

Megan makes her way though depressed neighborhoods, looks totally out of place with the gorilla-girl sweater, Teddy bear by arm, backpack. She catches some stares, dives into a liquor store.

INT. CHICAGO LIQUOR STORE

A young CHINESE CLERK assesses Megan as she walks in. Megan browses a few items, finds herself a cheap little flask of Scotch. She checks the price: $18.

She digs in her pocket, pulls a twenty. She takes the bottle and money to the counter, lays both down.

MEGAN
Hi.

CHINESE CLERK
ID?

Megan annoyedly digs-around in her pocket, produces an ID of some kind. She hands it to him, he looks it over. He eyes her, hands the ID back.

CHINESE CLERK (CONT’D)
Not you.

MEGAN
Pardon?

CHINESE CLERK
That not you.

MEGAN
My good man, I assure you——

CHINESE CLERK
No booze, no ID.

MEGAN
You mean, “No ID, no booze”...?

CHINESE CLERK
Whatever. Leave, please.

MEGAN
I can’t have it?

CHINESE CLERK
No!

MEGAN
Oh my God, look!!

She points behind the young man, he turns quickly. Megan grabs the bottle, bolts out the door. The clerk moves to give chase, but sees that Megan left the $20 bill.

He stops himself, looks around. He takes the twenty off the counter and pockets it, expressionless.

EXT. LAKE SHORE PARK - DAY

Megan walks Chicago Avenue, examines everything cheerfully.

She finds herself a spot, sits, sneaks drinks from her Scotch. She watches PEOPLE file by. All kinds of people.

She pulls her black & red notebook, scribbles. She puts it away, stands and walks toward a busy area.

EXT. LANDSCAPE THEATRE - DAY

Megan walks by a renovated theatre, the Landscape. She’s intrigued, looks the place over. There’s an office-printed sign on the glass door: AUDITIONS - PLEASE ENTER QUIETLY.

She does.

INT. LANDSCAPE THEATRE

Megan sneaks in. From O.S. there’s an AD-LIBBED reading going on, from Streetcar, a single male actor. Megan cautiously approaches the seating area. Maybe 250 chairs.

The theatre is dark, with basically just stage lights and a small floor-stand deep in the seats, where TWO 29-ISH MEN sit. They examine small scripts.

The smaller of the two men catches Megan observing. He bumps the other guy, who looks over at Megan, definitely impressed with her appearance. The smaller man whispers to the larger, he silently gets up and approaches Megan.

Megan gets the hell outta there. The guys smiles it off, the taller one walks back to his seat.

EXT. CHICAGO STREETS

Megan walking and observing.

EXT. CHASE BUILDING

Megan stares skyward at the Chase HQ building. She's bothered. She sits, watches people pass, thinks.

INT. CHASE BUILDING

Megan walks a large foyer to a row of tellers. She waits in line, antsy. Behind Megan a fancy BUSINESSMAN looks her over with disapproval. She turns and smiles at him, then takes her place at the TELLER's window, puts Teddy bear on the counter beside her.

MEGAN
Hi.

TELLER
Hello. How are you today?

MEGAN
We're great. Um, I think I might need a new ATM card.

TELLER
No problem. Was your old one reported lost or stolen?

Megan says nothing, simply stares at the teller.

TELLER (CONT'D)
Ma'am?

Megan is quiet. Her eyes burn. She sighs, walks away.

INT. CHASE FOYER

Megan walks across the foyer and out the building. After four beats she returns on the exact path she took to the door.

INT. CHASE BUILDING

Megan waits in line for a teller. She's called, and winds-up with the same teller as before! Megan puts Teddy bear on the counter beside her.

MEGAN
Hi.

TELLER
Hello. How are you today?

MEGAN
We're still great. Um, I definitely need a new ATM card.

TELLER
No problem. Was your old one reported lost or stolen?

Megan lowers her head into her arms, right on the teller's counter. There's an awkward pause.

MEGAN
(raises head)
I burned it.

TELLER
Okay, we'll need to make sure the old card is cancelled, and then we can issue a new one immediately. I'll need a picture ID, please.

Megan hesitates, then pulls an ID. The teller examines it, but isn't quite convinced. Megan puffs her cheeks, imitating a "fat face".

The teller smiles, types into her terminal. Megan examines the teller window, probing the thick glass and partition as if trying to figure a way through.

TELLER (CONT'D)
I've cancelled the old account and we're ready to issue a new card. We'll need you to fill out this form and select a new PIN number.

The teller pushes the form Megan's way. Megan starts to fill it out, pauses.

MEGAN
Don't suppose you have a fountain pen.

TELLER
(chuckles)
No, I'm sorry, I don't.

Megan hurriedly fills the form.

ANGLE OF: FORM - Megan writes LYSA MANNING in the name box.

BACK TO: Megan finishes the form. The teller puts a PIN pad in front of her.

TELLER (CONT'D)
Just select a new PIN and you're on your way. Also, this is a debit and credit card that works on most domestic and foreign ATMs.

Megan thinks, keys 2-1-8-7. She smiles at the teller.

EXT. ROUGH CHICAGO STREET - DAY

Megan walks, observes the afternoon. She finds a mean-looking apartment building. She puffs her pipe, scans the building.

INT. RENTAL OFFICE

Megan enters. A small black & white TV plays to a seated MANAGER, 51, a fat black man in T-shirt and droopy trousers. Not much else in the place, save for a clearly visible old home protection baseball bat with handle heavily taped.

MEGAN
Anything open?

He eyes her up and down, gets up and moves toward the desk.

MANAGER
Long as you ain't bringin' no trouble with ya.

MEGAN
Oh, no. Trouble runs away when I'm around.

She smiles a goofy smile, makes Teddy bear mimic a boxing move. The manager doesn't wanna smile, but does.

INT. APARTMENT STAIRWELL - DAY

With keys dangling in hand, Megan ascends the stairs. The sound in this place is not unlike the legendary ghettos of New York and Detroit: Background ambient din of arguments mixed with crying/yelling kids and various music.

Megan, all smiles, stops to examine paint flaking from a wall. She peels some, studies it. She sees a BLACK KID, 9, watching her from the 3rd floor door. He runs off.

INT. APARTMENT CORRIDOR

Oddly contrasty and appearing schizophrenic in wallpaper and plaster design. Megan enters here from the stairwell, makes a cursory check for the kid she saw. Suddenly...

J.J.
Who you?

MEGAN
(surprised)
Whoa! Megan. I'm new. Who you?

J.J.
You must be new, 'cause everybody know J.J. Where you stay?

MEGAN
Four Oh Two.

Megan continues; scene plays with Megan strolling down the corridor and J.J. bobbing around like a satellite.

J.J.
Why you carry that bear?

MEGAN
Shhhh! He's sleeping!

J.J.
You a story! You go with Tommy's brother?

MEGAN
Tommy Hilfger?

J.J.
Dud!

MEGAN
I know, dated, right?

Down the bleak corridor, Megan notices that an apartment door is ever so slightly ajar. A baby wails within, a bellow far from normal crying.

MEGAN (CONT'D)
Somebody's *really* not happy.

J.J.
Debbie's kid. She ain't around, though. Got popped last night.

MEGAN
Debbie was a balloon?

J.J.
(fake honkey)
Arrested?

MEGAN
I know. In some places "popped" means "shot," though.

J.J.
True.

They arrive at 402, which is one door from 401, where the baby noise is.

J.J. (CONT'D)
Been empty a long time. Better check for spiders!

MEGAN
(wide-eyed)
Spiders?!

J.J. wanders off, mimics kung-fu kicks and various martial arts moves as he walks down the hall. Megan fumbles with the multiple locks, enters...

INT. 402

She looks the place over: Four walls and a bathroom, though a bit larger than the daily-weekly. She turns and locks the door, looks out the peephole. She moves to the bathroom.

Over all of this, the 401 crying baby is clearly heard O.S.

In the bathroom, Megan puts Teddy bear in a corner, runs some water. She leans on the sink, looks at her reflection.

She stares a beat, then rummages her bag and pulls a purple lipstick. She applies a little. A touch up. She stares at her reflection a bit more, then writes on the mirror: AM I?

The O.S. scream of the baby has her bothered. She listens for a beat, then walks out.

INT. APARTMENT CORRIDOR

Megan exits 402, looks around. At the end of the hall to the left is J.J., doing handstands. He doesn't notice her. Megan closes 402, moves to 401's ajar door, knocks.

MEGAN
Helloooo? Anyone home?

Nothing. She gently pushes the apartment door.

INT. 401

Megan eases into the apartment. Forlorn lighting with a single lamp. She scans.

MEGAN
Hello?

The apartment is tidy, but quite spare. Everything seems meticulously in place, save for a half-eaten TV dinner and a couple beer cans on a coffee table near an active but silent old school tube TV.

In full view on the coffee table is a small open baggie of white powder, a pair of razor blades and a row of tiny lines prepared, one of them smeared as if hit by wind.

MEGAN (CONT'D)
Wow.

Megan cautiously follows the crying into the kitchen. Here again, everything's spotless, neat, nice. But lying nude in the kitchen sink——in puddles of its own waste——is a crying FEMALE BABY.

Unseen by Megan, J.J. sneaks into the b.g., stealthily dives behind a chair, watches her.

In the kitchen, Megan covers her nose and mouth in disgust. She's not quite sure what to do. She checks the lower cupboard, finds a towel, wets it, starts cleaning the infant.

MEGAN (CONT'D)
Shhhh.

As she continues, there suddenly appears in the kitchen doorway a big mean WHITE DUDE, 36. His eyes are red and crazy, with dark rings. Sweat stains, large gut, gap-toothed, an obvious meth guy, or worse. This is...

RENO
The fuck?!

Megan is stunned. Before she can say a word...

RENO (CONT'D)
Who the fuck are you to come in my house, bitch?!

MEGAN
The baby, I——

RENO
Fuck the baby, man, you got no business in here!

Megan collects herself, stands her ground.

MEGAN
Look, I just——

RENO
I don't give a fuck what you "just"! Get the fuck off my property, girl. Now!

Megan's recovering, and not liking his tone.

MEGAN
Sure. Fine.

She places the nasty towel back on the counter.

MEGAN (CONT'D)
Are you the father?

J.J.
(suddenly appears)
Nope. That's Reno. Debbie used to go with him. He just stealin' food!

MEGAN
Ooooh, I see.

Reno fakes a lunge at J.J., who zips out of there fast. Reno laughs, turns to Megan.

RENO
Scared *him*.

MEGAN
How gallant.

RENO
What?

MEGAN
Look, I only came in because I thought Debbie left the baby in here alone. Okay? I don't wanna interfere, but the baby needs attention. You can see that, right?

Reno pauses, seems to shift a gear or two. He sniffles, saunters over near Megan, studies her. He opens a cabinet, grabs a jar of roast peanuts, opens it, has a handful.

RENO
We all need attention.
(beat, eats)
Where'd you come from? I ain't seen you here before.

MEGAN
I'm new. So, the baby...?

RENO
New, huh? Well I'm not.

Reno looks at her a long while, seems to be trying to figure something out. He sniffles again.

MEGAN
(sarcastic)
Got a cold?

RENO
A real bad one.

MEGAN
Right. So, I'm gonna go now. Can I leave and not have to hear the baby screaming, please?

RENO
Y'know, you're not bad lookin'.

MEGAN
Thanks. The baby?

RENO
Yeah, the baby, the baby. Jesus. You wanna smoke a joint?
(MORE)

RENO (CONT'D)
Do a couple lines? Maybe suck my dick a little? I got ten bucks.

A peanut falls from his mouth. Megan stares with contempt.

MEGAN
(sarcastic as hell)
Sorry, but I have to go shave my balls. Take care of the kid, okay? Or find someone who will.

She moves to leave but he grabs her, goes for a kiss. Megan violently pushes him away. She turns to leave, Reno latches onto her solidly. They struggle.

Reno drags her to the kitchen counter, holds her, his free hand darts to a utensil drawer. Megan struggles ferociously, does damage, but Reno's a walking embankment. His hand gets the drawer loose, tries to grab something from a mass of silverware.

Baby still screaming, Megan kicks the drawer hard, knocks it out and to the floor. Knives and utensils scatter.

Too late: Holding her down with one hand, Reno brings a carving knife to Megan's cheek. She relaxes her protest, stares at him with a fiery gaze.

RENO
Now, bitch. Talk some shit. Go on.

MEGAN
(terrified; controlled)
Just relax, Reno. I'll leave. You don't want this.

RENO
Yeah? How do you know?
(Megan shrugs)
Goddamned right. This baby ain't your business. Why you makin' it your business?
(leans close)
You got some fuckin' spine comin' in here. I do respect that.

MEGAN
Reno, please——

RENO
(loud as possible)
Shut up!!
(quietly)
Okay.
(MORE)

RENO (CONT'D)
So, you gonna fuck me up about this baby anymore?
(she shakes her head)
Good. Gonna count on that. You got three seconds.

Reno slowly relaxes. Megan bolts from under him, slips, regains her footing.

RENO (CONT'D)
Onetwothree!!

He gives chase. Megan cruises out the door, runs down the hall toward the stairwell. Reno stops at the 401 doorway.

RENO (CONT'D)
And don't come back!
(to himself)
Fuckin' slut.

His attention segues to the baby's screams. He turns, closes the door behind. He walks back to the TV dinner table, sits for a second, then expertly does one of the powder lines, sans instrumentation. He leans back in the chair.

RENO (CONT'D)
Wonderful.

But, the baby.

RENO (CONT'D)
Aw, fuck! Shut up!!

He jumps up, walks maniacal to the kitchen.

INT. RENTAL OFFICE

The manager watches "Happy Days" reruns on the blurry tube TV as Megan frantically enters. She pounds repeatedly on the little counter bell.

MANAGER
Hey, what the hell?

MEGAN
You have to call the police on 401. There's a guy in there——

MANAGER
Reno? I know. Nothin' I can do about it.

MEGAN
(erratic)
No, wait, you don't understand. I think he's gonna hurt the baby. Debbie's baby. He's starving the baby. In the sink. And he grabbed me with a knife.

MANAGER
(confused)
Wait, how do you know Debbie?

MEGAN
(frustrated)
What?! Listen, Goddammit, you have to call the police!

She reaches over the counter, grabs the phone. The manager stomps over, grabs it back from her.

MANAGER
Lookie here, girl, this ain't——

MEGAN
Do something, will you?!

The manager would rather not be bothered, but...

MANAGER
He had a knife?

MEGAN
Yes!

He picks up the phone, starts to dial.

MANAGER
Alright. You better get outta here, though: Reno sure as hell ain't gonna be happy when the cops show. *If* they show.

Megan nods, exits. The manager dials.

EXT. MEAN-LOOKING APARTMENTS - DAY

Megan walks out, gets her bearings.

RENO (O.S.)
Yo, blood sister!

Megan stops, looks around.

RENO (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Blood sister!

Megan looks up. Reno's at his 4th floor window, smiling.

RENO (CONT'D)
You forgot somethin'!

With that, Reno tosses the crying baby out the window. It sails through the air, lands with a SLAP on the sidewalk directly in front of Megan.

The dead baby stares heavenward. Around its head a pool of brilliant blood spreads like an aura.

Megan is transfixed, dizzy. She falls to her knees, stares at the infant. Her chin quivers. Her hands go to her mouth.

In a few seconds her anguish graduates to utter rage. She stands, runs back inside the building.

INT. RENTAL OFFICE

Like an Olympic athlete, Megan jumps the desk, seizes the manager's home protection baseball bat.

MANAGER
Hey!

She re-jumps the desk, runs upstairs. Manager gives chase.

INT. CORRIDOR

Megan rounds the stairs near 401. She's immediately at the door, tries the knob: Locked. In a viscous firestorm, Megan uses the bat to beat the hell out of the door.

MEGAN
You motherfucker, Reno! I'm gonna fucking kill you! Open this door, you murderer! You fuck!

The door's wood splinters, its lock is broken. But this is an old building, made in the style of antiquity. So the door's not giving.

The manager emerges, and a couple OCCUPANTS have also come to see what's up. All are hesitant to act. Megan now alternates hysterical kicks and swings of the bat.

MANAGER
Christ A'mighty.
(to Megan)
Come on, now! Put the damned bat down!

Off the Manager's voice, Megan stops. She turns. She's no longer Megan. In fact, the sound of his voice has broken her rage, knocked her to another place.

MEGAN
Didn't you see?

She turns and stares at Reno's door, which has nearly broken in. Megan then stares at the manager.

Cracks spread across Megan. She's losing it. Tears stream, her body shudders. The bat slips from her hand, rattles to the floor.

She trembles in place, sobs violently. Then she slowly follows the bat down, collapses to her knees, slides against the wall.

She wails.

EXT. MEAN-LOOKING APARTMENTS - LATE AFTERNOON

Police cars line the street, crime scene tape laces the area. A small crowd mills around while Megan sits with a CPD DETECTIVE, 49. A uniformed CPD PATROLMAN, 32, brings Megan a coffee. She smiles, sips. Megan's look is dazed.

DETECTIVE
(writes notes)
That's when he let the child go?

MEGAN
He didn't let her go, Detective. He tossed her. Like this.
(motions)

DETECTIVE
Terrible. See a lotta horror shows out here, but somethin' like this.

Megan nods. She sips coffee, puts it down and begins to cry. She keeps hand at eyes, as if stopping the tears.

DETECTIVE (CONT'D)
You just let it out. Anyway, I got your statement. Thanks for hangin' in. I know it ain't easy.

He stands and walks away. Megan simply stares forward.

On this, a cuffed Reno is dragged from the complex by two burly CPD TASK FORCE COPS. He resists, rants AD LIB.

Reno then gets sight of Megan, who stares at him. Reno immediately stops squirming around, peels a sinister smile her way. Megan ignores.

RENO
Hey, wait! I gotta tell her somethin'!

TASK COP #1
Sure ya do.

RENO
Hold on, faggot. Hey, Megan!

The Task Cops keep Reno moving, but he twists toward Megan.

RENO (CONT'D)
(nice guy)
Hey! I just wanna say somethin'.

Megan's face shows nothing.

RENO (CONT'D)
I just wanted to say...from the bottom of my mean ol' heart...I wanna say...that I really wanna piss in your gas tank.

TASK COP #2
Fuggin' jerk-off.

Megan just stares at him as he's hauled away.

EXT. BUSY CHICAGO STREETS - NEAR SUNSET

Megan, walking amongst packed pedestrians. She's blank.

EXT. SOMEWHERE ON STATE STREET - TWILIGHT

On a stone bench, Megan sits writing in her red notebook while Chicagoans pass like a river. She's focused, blank, oblivious. She stops for a second, stoically ponders.

EXT. HOLY NAME CATHEDRAL - NIGHT

Megan walks outside the Holy Name Cathedral, stops to examine the seriously Gothic architecture. She moves closer, scans posted signs for times and services. The board mentions mass, baptism, confession, and so on.

INT. HOLY NAME CATHEDRAL

Megan enters. The place is a deserted wonder of construction. Shadows, statues, idols, and so on. Her shoes echo. She takes a seat in the empty pews, stares forward at the altar.

She spies a 4’ plaster statue of a thorn-crowned Christ in an agonized pose. She looks at it a long while.

She stands, walks to small Jesus. He’s looking heavenward, and she’s staring at him. She scans the place, sees the confessional near.

She looks back to Christ, gently grabs him and carries him awkwardly to the confessional. She places him in one side of the booth so that he faces the grille a priest would speak through. Then she enters the sinner’s side.

INT. CONFESSION BOOTH

Megan takes her seat, sort of looks around. She can see the vague plaster outline of Christ’s face on the other side of the grille. For a long beat she just sits there, staring.

She lies down, curls into a fetal position, head facing the confessional grille and Jesus. Just the two of them.

MEGAN
Bless me for my sins. They’re all I have. I’m not like you. I’m not made of light. I’m not made of anything. You’ve taken all the good things away from me. What do you do with all the things you take from people, I wonder?
(beat)
Bless me for my sins. I live with regret. Like a layer cake. A bad cake that never goes away.
(beat)
Do you regret? Do you cry from the things you do to others? I’d like to know. You let that man kill a baby. You let evil win all the time.
(MORE)

MEGAN (CONT'D)
We're supposed to love you, and you're supposed to love us. But you don't.
(couple beats)
And my daddy. You took him, too. He was murdered. And you watched. You took him. My rod and staff comfort me. But what protects me from you?
(emotionless tears)
I'm really, really confused. You make no sense. It's not a mystery, it's just nonsense. Maybe even lies. You don't really have a plan, do you? Maybe you can't. Maybe you're just as helpless as we are. Or maybe The Devil is stronger. Is that it?
(beat)
Can you help me, please?

Something here changes. Megan sits up, thinks for a beat or two, wipes tears.

MEGAN (CONT'D)
No, I don't suppose you can. And maybe you shouldn't. It'd be a shame for you to fuck-up this wonderful universe of yours.
(beat)
All the same, peace be with you.

Megan stands, departs the confessional. She stops and turns, looks at the statue of Christ.

MEGAN (CONT'D)
Dies Irae; Dies Illa...

Megan walks away. On the confessional bench, she's left her father's pipe.

EXT. THE DRAKE HOTEL - NIGHT

One of Chicago's finest. Megan walks into scene, stops and stares up at the signage. She seems relaxed.

INT. DRAKE HOTEL

Megan enters the stunning and elegant abode, definitely a sanctum for heads of state and the like. She's of a different cut now: Determined, refreshed.

Megan walks to the expansive front desk. A lovely female DRAKE CLERK is there.

DRAKE CLERK
Good evening, ma'am.

MEGAN
Hi. I've never been here before. What's the fanciest, most expensive room you've got?

DRAKE CLERK
(kinda humoring her)
Oh. Well, we have two. There's the Vice-Presidential...
(checks register)
Occupied. We do have the Presidential Suite available tonight thru Wednesday...at three-thousand two-hundred nine dollars.

MEGAN
Per night?!

DRAKE CLERK
Yes, ma'am. Per night. Total would be nine-thousand six-hundred and——

MEGAN
I'll take it.

Megan hands the teller her new debit/credit card. The clerk, though professional, is skeptical as hell.

DRAKE CLERK
I'll need a picture ID, ma'am.

MEGAN
Sure. But could you please not call me "ma'am"?

Megan smiles, bats her eyes.

INT. DRAKE PRESIDENTIAL SUITE - MORNING

A daybreak view of Chicago in this truly fabulous "Old World" room of remarkable taste and sophistication.

A semi-spiral stair leads to another level above. We HEAR a fan running O.S. and water splashing.

INT. DRAKE PRESIDENTIAL SUITE BATHROOM

With an unmade bed in the b.g., Megan sits in a huge Roman tub. She luxuriates in a draught of bubbles, happily enjoys her morning.

A nearby coffee machine has a half-full pot. There's a fancy porcelain coffee mug balanced on the edge of the tub. In the adjacent bedroom, a TV rebroadcasts a noisy O.S. hockey game.

EXT. DRAKE SUITE 6TH-STORY WINDOW - DAY

In a robe that's easily a couple sizes too large, Megan sits dangerously in an opened sixth-story window, feet & legs dangling like a gargoyle, her hair in a towel.

She enjoys her coffee, scans the streets below, watches people about their lives. She spies a group of BUSINESSMEN standing near a taxi. She thinks, quickly leaves the window.

INT. DRAKE KITCHEN

Megan enters, speedily grabs a paper coffee cup from a cupboard. She pours coffee from the porcelain cup to the paper one, all mischievous smiles and girlish eyes.

EXT. 6TH-STORY WINDOW

Megan returns to the window, stands into it, steadies herself with one hand as she leans recklessly into void. She casually extends her arm, holds the paper coffee cup out into the air. She calculates, judges, adjusts...and then lets the cup drop.

She watches the partially filled paper cup torpedo downward. It hits the sidewalk with a firecracker POP, splatters hot coffee all directions.

BUSINESSMAN #1
Hey, Goddammit!

Megan laughs herself silly, but silently so. Then, the laughter begins to fade, as does the novelty. The giggles leave, her face becomes more plain, and then more dire.

In the span of about ten beats, she starts to sob. A couple more beats and her silent giggling from previous becomes silent crying.

Doorbell. Megan composes, the doorbell rings again. She suddenly remembers something, leaps back into the suite.

INT. DRAKE SUITE ENTRANCE

Megan opens the door. An attractive ROOM SERVICE WAITER, 20, stands there with a large table of food. Enough for two.

MEGAN
Wow.

INT. DRAKE PRESIDENTIAL SUITE - DAY

Remains of the room service chow, quite a lot of food untouched. Megan——still in her robe but with towel out of hair——stands in thought at a window, smoking a cig.

INT. DRAKE PRESIDENTIAL SUITE BEDROOM

Megan sits like a statue in the center of the giant bed, identical to the opening scene. She has the room's landline telephone on the bed with her. She stares at it.

A large flatscreen OLED is in the room adjacent, has Sir Kenny's HENRY V movie. The film's Constable/Dauphin pre-battle argument gently overlaps from the b.g. as Megan lifts the phone receiver and dials.

Couple rings, then...

WOMAN (V.O.)
Manning residence.

Megan hesitates.

WOMAN (V.O.)
Hello?

MEGAN
Mom?

MARCIA - MEGAN'S MOTHER
Lysa? Please. Don't hang up.

MEGAN
I won't.

MARCIA
Are you okay?

MEGAN
Fine. I'm in Chicago.

MARCIA
By yourself?

MEGAN
Always.

MARCIA
You have to tell me——

MEGAN
So, how are things? How's Julie?

MARCIA
Lysa, we're fine. Don't worry about *us*. Why won't you just come home?

MEGAN
I don't know. I can't. Not now.

MARCIA
Two years, Lysa. You just call and hang up, we don't know where you are, if you're safe——

MEGAN
Are any of us "safe"? Was daddy?

No response for a couple beats.

MARCIA
That's over, Lysa.

MEGAN
No. It absolutely is not.

MARCIA
Lysa, what you're doing to yourself is wrong. It wasn't your fault.

MEGAN
(fighting tears)
Yes it was, mom.

MARCIA
Lysa——

MEGAN
It was my fault, and he's dead, and I'm alive, and it's not fair. It's not right. Nothing is right. Nothing at all.

MARCIA
Lysa, what good is all this? You haven't even used any money. How are you surviving?

MEGAN
Well, no, I used some last night and the day before. A whole lot, actually.

MARCIA
Come home. Please. You have to stop doing this to yourself.

MEGAN
I won't use the money anymore. I just needed a break.

MARCIA
Nobody cares about the money, Lysa. It was meant for you. Just use it and come home.

MEGAN
I have to figure it out. I'm trying. I really am.

MARCIA
Lysa. I love you. We all love you. Nothing has changed.

MEGAN
I have to go, mom. I'll call again soon, I promise. I love you. Bye.

MARCIA
Lysa——

Megan slowly hangs up. There's a several beat pause as she wipes tears, composes herself inside and out.

On the OLED in the other room...

RAMBURES
"My lord constable, the armour that I saw in your tent to-night, are those stars or suns upon it?"

CONSTABLE
"Stars, m'Lord."

DAUPHIN
"Some of them will fall to-morrow, I hope."

CONSTABLE
"And yet my sky shall not want!"

Megan kills the TV using the remote.

MEGAN
(whispering)
My sky shall not want.

INT. DRAKE PRESIDENTIAL SUITE BATHROOM

Megan enters, drops her robe. Nude, she crosses to the makeup table. She kills all lights. Dark a couple beats, then...

A match is stuck, a counter candle lit. Megan fires a cigarette from the candle's flame, puffs on the cig til the cherry's aglow. She passes the red/orange tip around her face and head, pausing at each eye-socket.

Then, she uses the cig to light another candle, places the cigarette in there, like an ashtray.

By the light of the candles, Megan observes herself, deeply staring. She pulls her hair away from her neck, grabs a length of side-growth between two fingers. She pulls slowly, but hard. Unsatisfied, she grasps the strand of hair in her fist, torques-down.

The hair RIPS from her scalp.

She contains her agony, tears well in each eye. Megan runs fingers through her side hair, which is now a mess of bad ledges and blood-red streaks...of real blood.

MEGAN
Well *that* was stupid.

INT. UPSCALE DEPARTMENT STORE - DAY

Megan energetically navigates an isle of haircare products, her head in a makeshift turban. She's redone her makeup: Her eyes are very dark; an expertly drawn mascara "tear" sits on her right cheek.

Megan stops at a product box, reads it, takes it, moves on. She stops before another box, considers the item, grabs it, dashes off.

INT. DRAKE PRESIDENTIAL SUITE BATHROOM

Bananarama's "Cruel Summer" plays loudly. The bathroom's a mess: Scattered boxes of dye, yellow and green-stained towels, scissors, Band-Aids, pins, and of course, gobs and gobs of Megan's hair.

Megan splashes in a sink. We can't see her face clearly.

MEGAN
Owwww! Why does it even burn?!
Dammit.

We do not SEE her head or face as she stops before the mirror, obviously examining her hair.

MEGAN (CONT'D)
That's what *I* say.

EXT. DRAKE - DAY

Megan emerges from the Drake lobby, her new "royal blue & platinum white" look a quantumly marked contrast from the formerly black, blonde, and blood Bettie Page.

Her hair's short now, slightly flared on the sides, jagged and wildly uneven all over. It's mostly shades of super-fabulous indigo, bisected at intervals with an utterly snow-white dye. While it looks homemade, because it is, there's also a Chanel-esque edge to the look, purposed and designed.

In a test, Megan turns her head rapidly side to side: The hair doesn't move much. Megan hails a cab, enters.

INT. 402 - DAY

Locks and latches clink, Megan enters the empty 402 abode from previous. She wastes no time finding Teddy bear, gives him a huge hug.

MEGAN
Hey! Were you worried? I wouldn't
leave you.

She fluffs him, looks him over.

MEGAN (CONT'D)
Like my new hair? Yeah? Didn't
scare you, did it? Aw.

She collects him and exits the place.

INT. BUILDING CORRIDOR

Megan walks from 402. She carefully finds her way past Reno's replaced door. Aside from crime scene stickers near the top and bottom of the jamb, it appears nothing at all went down.

Out of nowhere steps J.J.

MEGAN
Whoa! Got me again, little man!

J.J.
Yo, what happened to your head?

MEGAN
Now is that nice?

J.J. touches Teddy bear, feels its fur.

J.J.
Where you goin' with that?

MEGAN
We're leaving.

J.J.
Thought you did already.

MEGAN
Did you miss me?

J.J.
Hell, naw. I got lots o'friends.

MEGAN
Oooooh, I see.

J.J.
Where you goin'?

MEGAN
Not sure. Out there? Need to think. Have some coffee.

J.J.
Coffee nasty.

MEGAN
Boooooo.
(beat)
Well, I really gotta go. It was nice to meet you, J.J.

She extends her hand. They shake.

MEGAN (CONT'D)
Bye, now.

J.J. doesn't say a word. Megan exits, J.J. walks down the hall, pulls his boxing moves and fake Kung Fu kicks. He comes to Megan's door, knocks. Of course, no answer.

J.J. sits on the ground in front of the door, leans on it.

Like a ghost, Megan suddenly appears. She smiles at him. J.J. beams, but catches himself, goes back to “cool”.

MEGAN (CONT’D)
I had a talk with my friend, and he thinks he should stay with *you* for a while.

She hands J.J. the Teddy bear. He takes it, doesn’t react.

MEGAN (CONT’D)
You guys take care of each other!

Megan bends down, gives them both a peck. She smiles, waves goodbye. When she’s gone, J.J. examines the Teddy bear, then hugs the toy with affection.

FADE TO BLACK

EXT. CHICAGO - ESTABLISHING - DAY

A lovely afternoon frames the city.

EXT. SIDEWALK COFFEE SHOPPE

Leaned back in her chair, eyes closed, Megan suns herself. She almost looks asleep, has a large coffee mug and her black & red notebook on the table in front of her, along with a pack of Ruby clove cigarettes. Definitely in her own realm.

The man from the theatre, the taller one who’d gotten up from his seat, gingerly sits at the table with her. He’s dapper yet unassuming, with a kind face.

This is Mike.

MEGAN
(eyes still closed)
That seat was taken.

MIKE
Really?

MEGAN
Yes, by my personal bodyguard, Hugo, who any moment now will return and enforce my privacy with iron nunchaku.

MIKE
Brrr.

Megan opens her eyes, sees him. She assesses. No threat. She closes her eyes again.

MEGAN
You're from the theatre. Are you stalking me or something?

MIKE
Nah. I was just gonna ask why you ran out and didn't read.

MEGAN
I 87.3% believe you, actually. And what will you do with that remaining 12.7, should I be kind or foolish enough to give it?

MIKE
Not sure. Maybe buy you another coffee? Ask what's in the book?

She sits up, grabs the red notebook.

MEGAN
Nobody opens this book. Even *I* have to ask permission.

Mike laughs. In fact, Megan finds it funny, too.

MEGAN (CONT'D)
Okay, so, why are you here?

MIKE
Like I said, I saw you from the street——

MEGAN
No, dummy: Chicago?

MIKE
Oh! That was my theatre you trespassed. Dummy. Got it a couple years ago, and so far so good, as they say.

MEGAN
Well. *Respect*.

Megan pulls herself a clove, lights it, observes Mike cooly.

MIKE
So, you're not from here, right?

MEGAN
And you arrived at this, how?

MIKE
Mm, just a guess. You're at Columbia or something?

MEGAN
No.

MIKE
Well?

MEGAN
Well, what?

MIKE
Chicago. Why?

MEGAN
So, what's with you and the theatre stuff?

MIKE
You didn't answer my question.

MEGAN
And I'm not going to. So, theatre?

MIKE
I lost my father a couple years ago, so I——

MEGAN
Hah! How funny. Lost mine, too.

MIKE
And that's funny, how?

MEGAN
Just ironic. Anyway, continue.

MIKE
When he died, it kind of made me ask a lot of questions about life. I was totally sick of my job——

MEGAN
Which was?

MIKE
Pilot. Commuter planes.

MEGAN
(sarcastic)
Yeah, commercial pilot would certainly top most people's list of shit jobs. Ever try waiting tables?

MIKE
Look, I completely love flying. Big time. Got an aircraft, too, but...

She sips coffee with no reaction.

MIKE (CONT'D)
Listen, unless you're a fuckin' fighter pilot, flying for pay can actually get pretty mundane. You might be surprised.

MEGAN
Might. And, you spoke profanity. There's hope. You're doing Streetcar, huh? Love that.

MIKE
Yeah. On the other hand, we're not exactly doing Bukowski off a loading dock at two in the morning.

MEGAN
Touché. Bukowski didn't write for the stage, though. Clove?

MIKE
What? Really? Nah, they're too much for me.

MEGAN
Me, too. So, what's your name, kid?

MIKE
Mike.

MEGAN
Mm. Kinda bland.

MIKE
Well, excuse my presence.

MEGAN
No offense.

MIKE
None taken. Hey, I like my name. It's friendly. And your name? No, lemme guess: Alexa Porstandovich. *Baroness* Alexa, on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

MEGAN
Close. Just call me "Megan". Some people do.

MIKE
Suits you. Back to my originally evaded question. You're currently...?

MEGAN
Living from a bag.

MIKE
Okay, so let's be precise: What are you doing right this minute?

MEGAN
Judging you.

MIKE
A game two can play.

MEGAN
Swish, clang.

MIKE
That's right. Sooooo, anyway, how you feel about the theatre, and acting, and all that stuff?

MEGAN
I know something about it.

MIKE
Cool. Wellllllll. I was gonna ask if you wanted to come by in a couple hours, watch me help cast Streetcar. Could be fun.

MEGAN
I thought it was done.

MIKE
No, still casting. Some really decent talent from this town.

MEGAN
Harrison Ford, Frances McDormand, Geraldine Page...

MIKE
(mispronounced)
JAN-us Kamiński.

MEGAN
It’s “Ya-NOOSH,” actually.

MIKE
Yeah, well...

MEGAN
Sure, let’s look at your cast.

MIKE
Nice. Great! I, uh.
(he stands)
Okay, just one more thing: You’re killin’ me. What’s in the notebook?

She collects the notebook, stashes it.

MEGAN
What notebook?

MIKE
Hah! Dig it. So, one o’clock?

They shake hands, Mike goes his way. Megan watches him for a couple beats, returns to her sunbathing.

INT. LANDSCAPE THEATRE - DAY

It’s dark, save for the stage and a row of seats in the back, near a lighting booth.

In this area sits Mike, with the other gentleman from before, DANNY, the director. Onstage is THERESA CLARK, 40, a quasi-attractive brunette who seems a little “show-bizzy”. She cold-reads the part of Blanche from a sheet.

THERESA
“...which wasn’t empty, but had two people in it; the boy I had married, and an older man who had been his friend for years...”

Theresa’s delivery is well-intended but not quite pro. When finished, Theresa does an “actory” bow of her head for a couple beats.

MIKE
Great, Theresa. Appreciate it.

THERESA
Shall I thank the Academy?

MIKE
You may yet. Not that awards even matter anymore.
(to Danny, whispering)
Well?

DANNY
(British; East end)
Don’t know, Mike: Certainly looks like Blanche, but as far as her chops, well——

A door opens theatre right and Megan enters. She scans about, Mike holds up his hand. She comes.

MEGAN
Nice house.

MIKE
Megan, this is Danny, the director.

MEGAN
Ah, Direttore...

DANNY
Great hair!
(to stage)
Okay, let’s have Troy back on, please. Try “Mitch” if you could.

MIKE
(to Megan)
Glad you’re here.

Megan sits. An actor, TROY, walks on stage with cold sheet. He clears his throat, begins immediately.

TROY
”That pitch about your ideals being so old-fashioned and all the malarkey that you’ve dished-out all summer.”

Troy is actually quite excellent as Mitch. Megan watches.

TROY (CONT'D)
"Oh, I knew you weren't sixteen anymore. But I was a fool enough to believe you was straight."

DANNY
Okay, Troy, great!

TROY
Already?

DANNY
(to Mike)
Heard him do this before. He's definitely the one, Mike. Let's just move to——

MEGAN
Can *I* read for Blanche?

Mike and Danny look over, a tad surprised.

MIKE
Well, I——

DANNY
Why not?
(to Troy)
Great, Troy, stay close.

TROY
Cheers.

Troy walks off, Danny smiles at Mike, who then sorts through some sheets, hands one to Megan.

MEGAN
That's okay. Don't need it.

MIKE
Well, how do you do?

DANNY
Are you quite sure?

Megan just smiles and walks away, mounts the downstage stairs, slowly drinks the environment. Danny gives Mike a silent look of the kind that says, "Uh, oh"...

When Megan finally lands beneath the single medium spot, she's blissful. Then as Danny and Mike watch perplexed, Megan ritualistically kneels, kisses the wooden floor. Then she lays her cheek against it, smiles wide, eyes closed.

DANNY (CONT'D)
Well, then.

MIKE
(uncomfortable)
Um, Megan?

MEGAN
(rises)
"He was in the quicksands and clutching at me, but I wasn't holding him out, I was slipping in with him! I didn't know that. I didn't know anything except I loved him unendurably, but without being able to help him or help myself."

Mike and Danny are extremely impressed, as the performance is highly dialed and authentic. Theresa watches carefully from the right wing.

MEGAN (CONT'D)
"Then I found out. In the worst of all possible ways. By suddenly coming into a room that I thought was empty...which wasn't empty, but had two people in it; the boy I had married, and an older man who had been his friend for years."
(instantly, like a flipped switch)
Okay, cut.

Megan immediately walks off toward stage right, her abrupt end has everyone off guard. Theresa intercepts her.

THERESA
That was...*nice*. Really nice.
Miss...?

MEGAN
Megan?

THERESA
Megan. I'm Theresa Clark, weekend anchor with WFLD. I help with publicity for the theatre, too.
Great to meet you.

MEGAN
Cool. You, too.

THERESA
I'm going-out for Blanche, as well.

MEGAN
Excellent. Godspeed!

THERESA
So, I didn't get your last name?

MEGAN
Um, Clark?

THERESA
Oh! That's mine, too.

MEGAN
Yeah, but I don't think we're related.

THERESA
Oh! Well, nice to meet you, Megan Clark. You take care, now.

MEGAN
You, too.

Megan moves back to Mike and Danny. She sits.

DANNY
Megan, are you Equity, by chance?

MEGAN
Was qualified, back in the day.

DANNY
The day? Where've you worked?

MEGAN
Around. Community stuff, you know.

MIKE
Hey! Let's all get dinner and talk!

DANNY
We've a few more to read, Mike.

MEGAN
Yeah, and I should be going. Wouldn't want the other players to think I'm smooching-up to you guys.

DANNY
Smart girl.

Megan flutters her eyelids at Danny.

DANNY (CONT'D)
Gino's. Seven-ish?

MIKE
Great!
(to Megan)
Famous local pizza place.

MEGAN
Super. See ya there.

She leaves. Danny looks at Mike, smiles cleverly.

EXT. LANDSCAPE THEATRE - AFTERNOON

Megan walks from the Landscape, finds Theresa Clark standing there. They smile at one another. Fakely.

THERESA
Megan! Hi! Listen, I just wanted to say again how much I loved your audition.

MEGAN
Thank you. I liked yours, too.

THERESA
You seem very experienced. And I swear I've seen you someplace before. Did you ever work with Second City?

MEGAN
Nope. Hey, I have an appointment. See you back here sometime?

THERESA
Great!

Megan extends her hand, Theresa shakes it, Megan walks off. Theresa watches Megan walk away. Her face sours, she quickly removes an Android phone, types.

INT. GINO'S PIZZA - NIGHT

A noisy, casual place. Megan, Mike, and Danny sit at a table with a pitcher of beer. Danny is with his girlfriend, LORNA, a redhead. Remnants of pizza and wings scatter about, the whole group laughs hard, obviously a bit toasted.

DANNY
So the poor guy shows up and they're shootin' hi-def porn right there in his living room! They told him it was a cat food gig!

The table laughs.

LORNA
(Italian accent)
He should know better than to rent a location to someone like that.

MIKE
Los-fucking-Angeles, man.
(to Megan)
You're from there, right?

MEGAN
LA? What makes you think so?

DANNY
It's the whole "look" thing.

LORNA
No, no, she looks very European.

MEGAN
Actually, I'm from Rhode Island. Originally. Moved to Cincinnati when I was eight-ish? But I've lived other places. Including Europe. And Montréal.

LORNA
Oooo, parlez-vous Français?

MEGAN
Oui.

LORNA
Cool. See, guys? And Megan, I hear you're going to be Blanche.

A shocker. Everybody goes quiet, Danny looks exposed.

MEGAN
I'm really too young for that role. I was just fooling around today.

LORNA
But Danny said——

DANNY
Lorna, my sweet!

MIKE
Well, yeah, Megan, we basically had something specific in mind for Blanche. And...you're it! As for the age thing...makeup?

DANNY
If you want the part, luv, it's yours. You rocked.

MEGAN
I see.

MIKE
To Blanche.
(they all toast)

MEGAN
To Stanley.

MIKE
Who?

MEGAN
Nevermind. So: When do we start?

DANNY
Next week. You up for it?

MEGAN
Next week is...two days from now?

DANNY
Indeed.

MEGAN
Great. I'm in.

MIKE
I'll second that.

LORNA
Won't be great for Theresa, though.

MIKE
Oh, God. I know.

MEGAN
The TV news person?

DANNY
Yeah. No place for her, this time. I left her a voice mail about it a bit earlier.

MIKE
What? Why would you do that?

DANNY
She insisted, Mike. Wanted to know immediately.

MIKE
Jesus. Just like her.

MEGAN
I don't get it.

DANNY
Mike?

MIKE
Well...a long time ago, I dated her. Briefly. Very briefly. She's married now. I know, she's a little older. But really it was her, uh, ambition that was...y'know?

MEGAN
Ambition not bad.

MIKE
I was being kind. She's a little ruthless. We try and keep her happy for various political and exposure reasons, but——

DANNY
Can't stand her, myself. A person can't just suck blood full time the way she does. It's bad form.

MEGAN
Indeed. A few drops go nice in a martini, though.
(they all stare, then laugh)
Well, I hate to cut it short, but I really should get back.

MIKE
I'll take you.

Megan looks unsure.

DANNY
He’s not dangerous. That I’m *aware*.

MEGAN
Okay. Lorna, a pleasure. Danny...?

DANNY
All mine, luv.

The all stand, shake hands, embrace, cheek kiss, all that. Mike and Megan leave.

LORNA
What side of town is she on?

DANNY
Mike says she’s living at The Drake.

LORNA
The Drake?!

DANNY
I know, beats me.

LORNA
Strange. She doesn’t carry a phone, you know.

DANNY
Yeah, Mike said so. More power to her, I say.

LORNA
I like her. I feel like I know her from something.

DANNY
Me, too. I do dearly hope it wasn’t one of those funny websites.

LORNA
And how do you know about those?

DANNY
Research, of course.

She tosses a pizza crust at him, more playful than angry.

EXT. CHICAGO ROADS - NIGHT

Mike and Megan make way in an older BMW sedan.

INT. MIKE'S CAR

MIKE
Thanks much for coming tonight. Really. You kinda turned over the fuckin' soil here.

MEGAN
Crazy, isn't it?
(beat)
No, thank you, Mr. Mike.

MIKE
Wow. This is, like, crazy.

MEGAN
I just said that.

They look at one another, laugh.

MIKE
But it is, right?

MEGAN
I've seen worse.

MIKE
Cool. So listen: I don't wanna pry or anything, but those, um, tattoos of yours: Do they mean anything? They kind of look Arabic.

MEGAN
People call it "ink" these days. From a book by Abu al-Bīrūnī around 1021. About the study of shadows.

MIKE
Shadows? Tell more.

MEGAN
Later.

MIKE
You don't give anything easily, do you?

MEGAN
Never. Oh, except for occasional bites that break the skin.

MIKE
(smiles)
We should go flying sometime.

MEGAN
You have wings?

MIKE
Dummy. Told you I had an aircraft.

MEGAN
Can't you just say "plane"?

MIKE
No such word. Anyway, I try and get to the *airfield* at least a couple-three times a month.

MEGAN
Awesome. Yeah, but no stunts. It might make the angels angry.

She mimes devil horns on her head, sticks out her tongue. Mike thinks for a couple seconds, then...

MIKE
Hah! So, you have any professional rules about dating, or anything?

MEGAN
Yes. I have to like the person. Oh, drop me here if you could.

EXT. CHICAGO SIDEWALK

Mike's sedan pulls quick to the side of the road, a lot of traffic passes. Megan exits.

MIKE
Where the hell you goin'? It's cold out!

MEGAN
Gotta work-off that beer.

MIKE
What? Okay, well, for God's sake, be careful!

MEGAN
I promise I won't hurt anyone. Ta, ta, Mr. Mike.

She blows him a kiss, walks off. He pulls away into traffic, shaking his head all the while.

Megan walks, absorbs the city: Buildings sparkle dark with shadow and light, sounds and reflection pour from all sides.

She winds-up in a dim alley. She scans about, sees a fire escape above, its ladder partially extended. She grasps the bottom rung, expertly swings herself up and onto the ladder.

She climbs briefly, comes to a fire landing. On either side of the scaffolding sit windows; one is dark, the other is yellow from light and bad curtains.

Megan sneaks over, peeks into the yellow one. An OLD WOMAN watches TV. The woman's living space is small, with tired and valueless furnishings. The TV carries a sitcom of some sort.

Megan noticeably pans her head from the old lady to the TV, as if watching the show and then analyzing its effect. Smiling, Megan sits on the fire escape, thinks. She lies down fetal, goes to sleep.

INT. DRAKE HOTEL LOBBY - MORNING

Megan enters, looks a bit rumpled. She yawns, stops to smell a huge flower arrangement. Megan doesn't notice the SKINNY KID, 19, across the lobby, who focuses a pro-grade digital camera, snaps several shots of her.

Megan senses, turns. She sees the Skinny Kid, who now panics. He lowers the camera, smiles stupid. Megan walks over.

MEGAN
What are you doing?

SKINNY
Just...well...school?

Megan gently grabs his hands, leads him to put the camera back in front of his face. She steps back, poses for him in a variety of expressions: Silly, erotic, studious, ecstatic, caricatured...

And then she's done.

MEGAN
Class dismissed.

She's off. Skinny is relieved, if shaken.

INT. DRAKE PRESIDENTIAL SUITE

The shower runs full, then shuts off. Megan appears, drying with a towel.

She quickly wraps a separate towel around her hair, walks to the bedroom, grabs a map of the city from an adjacent nightstand, sits to study it.

She looks over to the landline: The message light flashes. She slides to the phone, lifts the receiver, follows the retrieval instructions.

MIKE (V.O.)
Megan...Mike...wow, I just dropped you off. Anyway, listen...I was thinking, y'know, you can't really live in a hotel the whole time you're here, right? So I was wondering if you might be interested in this loft at the theatre. We use it mainly for guest stars, but it's empty now, and it's pretty cool.

A sudden burst of static hits the message. It quickly clears, and then...

MIKE (V.O.)
Wanna have a look? We can work something out on the rent, too. You'll never miss a rehearsal! Call me. Oh, and thanks for a cool time tonight. I really dug talking. Bye!

Megan hangs up, thinks. She removes the towel from her head, lays back, stares at the roof.

INT. DRAKE SUITE - DAY

Megan, dressed, grabs a wireless landline telephone from the kitchen, moves to the living room. She sits, drinks coffee, stares at the phone. She dials, each number pressed slowly. The other end rings and rings. Answering machine picks up.

MARCIA (V.O.)
Hello. We're not in, but please leave a message. Thank you.

Beep.

MEGAN
Mom? It's Lysa. Listen, I... I've decided to come home. But not yet. I'm gonna do a play in Chicago, start the engines a little. It's a really neat little theatre, and the people are really nice.
(MORE)

MEGAN (CONT'D)
And nobody knows anything, so, no worries. And...yeah, I think you're right about the things you said. I just need some time.

A brilliantly red cardinal lands on the window sill. Megan pauses, watches it. The bird flies off.

MEGAN (CONT'D)
And...anyway, I just wanted to say all that. Oh, I'm gonna take a loft at the theatre for a bit, so I'll give you my number when I move. Okay, I better go. Love you. Can't wait to see you. I'll have to fly you and Julie out for the play, the little brat. Love you. Always. Bye.

Megan hangs up, satisfied.

There's a knock at the door. Megan gets up, goes to the peephole. She opens the door to a DELIVERY GUY.

He holds a big, heart-shaped gold box.

DELIVERY GUY
Ms. Megan? Sweet for the sweet, courtesy of a Mr. Mike.
(hands the box)
Sign...here please.
(Megan signs)
Have a nice day.

MEGAN
Mmm-hmm!

All smiles, she closes the door, examines the imported Chocolat de Kat box.

She carefully undoes the killer crepe and ribbons, finds herself staring at a gold foil wrapped skeleton key.

MEGAN (CONT'D)
Oh. My. God.

There's a note:

MEGAN...THOUGHT YOU MIGHT NEED AN EXTRA KEY TO THE LOFT. I ALREADY ATE THE ORIGINAL. XO. MR. MIKE.

She unwraps the front teeth of the key, breaks off the chocolate, pops it in her mouth, sits back in ecstasy.

EXT. STATION WFLD CHICAGO - LATE AFTERNOON - ESTABLISHING

INT. THERESA'S WFLD OFFICE

THERESA
(on a call)
Yes, the food was terrific! Saturday? Great! You have a wonderful afternoon, Commissioner! Yes, I'll ask her. Take care!
(hangs up, scribbles on a pad)
Cocksucker.
(phone rings)
Theresa Clark. Gabe! Anything? Well. There in a flash.

INT. WFLD RESEARCH

A heavily bearded and pony-tailed GABE, 45, sits at a cluttery computer desk. Looks like mall Jesus. Theresa rounds the corner.

GABE
Back here.

He stands, they walk to a private office. Gabe goes to an active computer with two flat monitors attached. He brings up a website on one...

GABE (CONT'D)
Now...

...then pulls Megan's photos——as taken by Skinny Kid——on the second. Afterward he opens Firefox, goes to a link.

It pops on the screen. Picture of a chubby, conservative young woman in a very expensive Chanel cocktail dress. She's under escort of a BEAUTIFUL YOUNG MAN in a tux. The young woman walks a red carpet, surrounded by press and public.

Though younger and bit large, it's unmistakably Megan. A caption reads: LYSA MANNING, DAUGHTER OF INDEPENDENT OHIO STATE SENATOR CHUCK MANNING.

GABE (CONT'D)
Some big-time Chuck Manning event. Three years ago, maybe?

THERESA
Hooooly shit. I saw that!

GABE
Hell of a guy. People on both sides loved him.

THERESA
I know. Not interested.

GABE
Wow. Anyway, you know what happened that night.

Gabe brings-up a story on CNN, about the murder of Independent Ohio State Senator Chuck Manning. Headline reads STATE SENATOR KILLED IN LIQUOR STORE HEIST, KILLS GUNMAN.

A sub-head reads DAUGHTER LYSA TRAUMATIZED. A pic of Megan is there, sitting on a curb outside the liquor store at night, surrounded by Cincinnati police officers. Obviously crying.

THERESA
She completely disappears, and now this. Fuck me. This is a story. Owe you a lunch, Gabe.

GABE
A very nice lunch, T. And vegan.

THERESA
Mmm hmm. You have a wonderful day!

She sprints from the office.

INT. LANDSCAPE THEATRE

Megan enters. She walks toward the stage, intercepted by Mike. She hands him a piece of gold foil.

MEGAN
I'm sorry sir, but I'm afraid I ate the evidence.

MIKE
The whole damned thing? Wow. So... you want the place?

MEGAN
Might be wise to have a look first. Wouldn't want to find spiders.

INT. LOFT APARTMENT

Dark, then lights. Megan and Mike enter. The place is clean, neat, well designed, fairly spacious. A crescent-moon window shows the sky, a couple stage flats are stored.

A big chandelier, totally out of place, hangs above all.

MIKE
Well?

MEGAN
Chandelier, really?

MIKE
Yeah, I know. But otherwise?

MEGAN
Tomorrow. Yeah, I think so.

MIKE
Sweet! Very cool. Hey, you hungry?

MEGAN
Always.

EXT. LANDSCAPE THEATRE - NIGHT

Megan and Mike exit. Mike locks the doors, Megan observes.

MEGAN
This theatre is really important to you, isn't it?

MIKE
Totally. Keeps me focused, for sure. Which wasn't easy after my dad's situation.

MEGAN
I can relate. Tell me, have you been to his grave lately? I ask because...I can't go to my own dad's grave. Not just yet. I just can't. Not sure I can handle it.

MIKE
Took me some time. Just remember, it's what he would want. He really would. We all forget that, about dying. That other people really do care about the way it hits the rest of us. We need to honor that.

MEGAN
That's really wonderful. Now, please help me understand——

A bright light suddenly hits the pair.

Standing before them is a TV CAMERAMAN, FOX/WFLD logo clearly on his rig. Aside him, smiling like a shark, is Theresa.

THERESA
Lysa Manning! I was hoping we could have a few words with you!

MIKE
Theresa?! What the hell?

Mike is upbeat, perhaps thinks it's a joke.

MEGAN
Think you have the wrong person.

THERESA
You *are* Lysa Manning, aren't you? Daughter of murdered Independent Ohio State Senator Chuck Manning? It's been more than two years since you disappeared from the public. Can you tell us where you've been? Why you've lost so much weight? And what's with the new look?

MIKE
Can somebody tell me what's goin' on here?

MEGAN
Let's go.

Megan pulls him and they walk briskly away. Theresa gives chase, of course.

THERESA
Can you confirm the rumors that you were kicked from the University of Cincinnati, for drug use?

Megan stops cold. She turns, faces Theresa's empty smile.

MEGAN
There were never any rumors like that. Not ever.

THERESA
Can you tell us, then, why you quit school and left the public radar?

Megan and Mike walk away...and though Theresa wants to persist, she stops.

THERESA (CONT'D)
(to cameraman)
Fuck it, that's plenty. Pack it up.

EXT. STREETS OF CHICAGO - NIGHT

Mike and Megan walk. Mike is looking at his object of affection in a light entirely different. She notices.

MEGAN
Sucks to be me, right?

MIKE
No, that's not——

MEGAN
Whatever.

MIKE
Wanna talk about it?

MEGAN
No.

MIKE
I'd like to help.

MEGAN
How are you at raising the dead?
(shedding tears)
Just...keep walking.

INT. SUSHI BAR

A hip place, but quiet. Megan and Mike pick at a plate of tuna sashimi. Megan tilts back a sake, has a look at Mike.

MEGAN
I'm not mad at you. So don't think I am.

MIKE
I understand.

MEGAN
Having someone taken from you. It's awful, Mike. So very awful.

MIKE
I know the feeling.

MEGAN
I know you do.

MIKE
Fuckin' Theresa, man.

MEGAN
She's ugly inside. They all are, those kinds of people. They love pain. It sells. They're an abomination. And I hate them.

MIKE
It does, however, come with the territory.

Megan looks at Mike, expression absolutely blank. Mike is a bit uncomfortable, plays in his sashimi.

MIKE (CONT'D)
Sorry, just being realistic.

MEGAN
How much do you know about me? About what happened?

MIKE
Well, just some of the news stories. About the, um——

MEGAN
Murder. Say it.

MIKE
Murder. What do you know about me?

She looks him over, blankly, forms a thought or two.

MEGAN
Good heart. Real. Silly. But deceptively strong. Must be that lovely face. Ultimately, very foolish. Yet I trust you somehow.

MIKE
So I'm foolish for actually *caring* about you?

MEGAN
Possibly.
(beat)
I need to say something to somebody. Call a journalist, or whatever. I mean, if *I* don't, Theresa or somebody else will.

MIKE
Probably all over Facebook and other social shit by now. How about just telling your side?

MEGAN
They all told it mostly the way it happened. The stupid political talking heads and magazine shows and stuff.

MIKE
Mostly?

Megan is uncertain. She hesitates, looks at him long and hard, perhaps trying to discern his worth.

MEGAN
Mostly.

BEGIN FLASHBACK:

EXT. CINCINNATI - NIGHT - ESTABLISHING

A blacked-out limo passes the Duke Energy Convention Center.

INT. LIMO

Megan——an almost unrecognizable younger, heavier version, with decidedly different hair and tone——shares a seat with her mother and JULIA, 15-ish, Megan's thin younger sister. They're dressed most extraordinarily, Megan identical to the event news photo we'd earlier seen.

Sitting across from them is Megan's FATHER, Gene, 62 or so. Benevolent-looking, tall, gaunt, he wears a full tux and tails, smokes the "old man" pipe Megan later carried.

Gene observes the passing streets.

MEGAN
Oh, my God, mom! We've got to go to this place called The Blind Lemon!
(MORE)

MEGAN (CONT'D)
They have *such* amazing talent there tonight.

MARCIA
Is that a theatre?

JULIE
(rolling eyes)
It's a bar?

MARCIA
Lysa!

Megan's father clears his throat, doesn't break his stare out the window.

GENE
Lysa, that's indeed a bar. A great one, too. But you're not old enough to drink in public, and a public servant like myself, well...

JULIE
Oh, please, dad!

GENE
Besides, you and I have a nine o'clock tee-off tomorrow...if you're still interested, that is.

MEGAN
Of course, daddy. But I wanna do The Lemon, too!

GENE
Lysa, what would happen if, say, news got out that we all went into a bar: Me, you, your mother, your fifteen year-old sister...?

JULIE
C'mon, dad! The city loves you! Who's gonna bother us?

MEGAN
No, wait. No, daddy's right. As usual. Let's just go home, then.

Her father gives an expressionless wink Megan's direction, goes back to examining the city passage.

JULIE
Lysa, you suck!

MARCIA
Hey!

MEGAN
No, home will be fun!

GENE
We'll certainly need champagne to accompany. Something new and tasty. We're low at the house, correct?

MEGAN
Um, yes. There's a liquor store along this street somewhere.

MARCIA
Now, wait a minute, Lysa...!

GENE
Drinking within the privacy of one's home is permissible, even if under-aged. Besides, if you don't tell anyone, neither will I. I'd say that works.

MEGAN
Can you get me a pack of clove cigarettes while you're in there?

She does her trademark batting of the eyes. Gene's not too happy about it, but still smiles.

GENE
Yes, how else are you going to learn just how terribly bad smoking is? You'll give it up soon enough.

EXT. LIQUOR STORE

The limo stops. Megan's father exits, looks around, puffs his pipe. Almost no traffic afoot. Gene reaches back into the limo, retrieves a fancy top hat, puts it on.

GENE
I shall return.

He walks off.

INT. LIMO

Marcia and Julia share AD LIB conversation.

MEGAN
Mom, I have something to tell you. And I don't want you to tell daddy. Not yet.

Marcia looks concerned.

JULIA
Fuck, she's pregnant!

MEGAN
Idiot!

MARCIA
(very angry)
Julie! Have you lost your mind?! What is it, Lysa?

MEGAN
I want to quit the acting stuff. I don't think the theatre is——

MARCIA
(stunned)
Why would you want to leave your acting? It's all you ever wanted.

MEGAN
I just don't want to do it this way anymore. With dad's life being all over the place, especially.

MARCIA
Your father is very popular, Lysa. Not many in politics can say that.

MEGA
Exactly. So what if I throw tomatoes at a bakery, or something? Keeping daddy in a good light is super important. Am I good enough to do that?

JULIA
No.

MEGAN
You shut up!

MARCIA
Listen, your father and I will support whatever it is you want to do, but tonight you're going to have fun. Right? Right.
(MORE)

MARCIA (CONT'D)
Let's talk it over tomorrow.
(to Julie)
You, young lady, say nothing to your father. Kapish? And I can see we need to have a chat about your filthy mouth.

Julia looks acid Megan's direction. Megan fumbles in her purse for a cigarette. While she's doing so, we catch a glimpse of the black and red notebook.

MEGAN
I'm gonna smoke.

Marcia wears a disapproving look. Megan exits the limo.

EXT. LIMO

Megan walks behind the limo, lights-up. She contemplates the night, puffs her cig, expression sort of melancholy.

Two quick GUNSHOTS fire O.S., from inside the liquor store.

Megan freezes. She looks toward the liquor store entrance. She gathers her fabulous gown, run-walks down the sidewalk.

INT. LIQUOR STORE

Megan rounds a corner wall in front of the store's entrance. She scans everything, sees nothing amiss. She opens the heavy glass door, enters. It's quiet. *Too* quiet.

MEGAN
Daddy?

She cautiously moves forward, senses trouble. She rounds a rack of potato chips, and there he is:

Lying on his side, a lake of blood around his head, is her father. He's been shot in the neck and obviously grappled with his severed jugular before dying in a fetal curl. Splatters of blood drench the area.

Megan's father's right pant leg is painted with crimson handprints. We SEE why, as an "ankle-piece" pistol shows.

Nearby, behind the cash register, is a grisly-looking ROBBER. He's a white guy, 28, tall and skinny, has piercing light-green eyes. Hair is in a sloppy Samurai-style do.

He hasn't noticed Megan, being intensely about the business of trying to pry the wall safe behind the register. On the floor beside him is a dead ATTENDANT, barely in view.

Megan grabs her face, is near to an outburst of grief. She drops to her knees, wants to scream. She hyperventilates, only slightly hidden from the shooter's view.

She looks at her dead father, his blood still oozing from a lifeless wound. She looks toward the shooter, not knowing what to do. She looks at her father again, takes notice of the ankle piece.

She gingerly slinks toward her father. Softly, slowly, always watching the robber. She pulls her father's pant leg, the robber continues his thing.

Megan pops the ankle trigger guard, the pistol is ready.

Frustrated by the unyielding safe, the robber slams the wall, turns and briskly rounds the counter on his way out. He stops cold when he sees Megan. She does not have the pistol in hand...but the grip is in her palm.

Robber and Megan study each other for several beats. The robber, with no change of expression, quickly lifts his .32 revolver her direction.

He fires.

The shot misses Megan; the ricochet twangs deadly. The robber runs like a motherfucker, virtually jumping Megan in his haste. He clears the door, and is gone.

Megan pauses. She clenches her teeth, becomes an animal.

MEGAN (CONT'D)
No.

In a quick move Megan pulls her father's weapon. She slips her heels off, gives chase.

EXT. LIQUOR STORE

Megan bolts into the night, pistol in hand. She runs in the direction the robber ran, and sure enough she finds the bastard trying to scale a chain link fence in the back.

She expertly raises her father's pistol. As if sensing her energy, the robber turns. He sees her, freezes cold.

ROBBER
Don't.

Megan fires, the robber takes a slug on the shoulder blade, fumbles his .32 which falls to the ground.

The robber drops in agony from the fence, looks at Megan. Megan immediately fires again, hitting the robber squarely in the mouth. Bits of teeth and blood fly. He screams horribly, falls to his knees.

Megan walks over to him, coldly shoots him in the heart. And then in the head. The robber flops to the ground, dead. Megan drops the pistol, turns and walks to the liquor store.

INT. LIQUOR STORE

Megan dazedly walks inside, assesses her father's body. She stops, kneels, shuddering with sorrow. Finally, she lays down beside her father, spooning him, crying intensely.

Megan's mother and sister enter in the b.g.

MARCIA
Oh my God! Oh, no!

FADE TO BLACK

EXT. LIQUOR STORE - NIGHT

The place is awash in COPS, DETECTIVES, PRESS. The whole area is cordoned-off. In the back of a police cruiser is Marcia, wrapped in a blanket, wailing, with Julie at her side.

Megan sits on the ground of the parking lot, staring at the liquor store. Various PAPARAZZI snap photos from behind crime scene tape. One of their pix will undoubtably become what we saw earlier from Gabe's research.

An older, suited CAPTAIN approaches Megan. He places a warm blanket around her. She's appreciative. He smiles, sits on the ground beside her.

CAPTAIN
Hiya, Lysa. Well, Goddammit, I don't know what to say.

MEGAN
Then don't say anything.

CAPTAIN
(nods, looks away)
Your dad and I were pretty close, you know. Hell of a cop was Gene. Before the politics.

MEGAN
Hell of a father. During it *all*.

Tears stream Megan's face, her expression doesn't change.

CAPTAIN
Lysa, I have to ask your permission on this, but here's how I want to handle the situation.

MEGAN
What do you mean?

CAPTAIN
I mean it looks to me like your father shot that guy up pretty good. Just a little too late.

MEGAN
But *I'm* the one who shot him. It was me.

CAPTAIN
No, no. It seems pretty clear to us that your father did the shooting. Pretty clear.

MEGAN
But that's not the way it happened.

CAPTAIN
According to what we found, Lysa, it's exactly what happened. No need for further investigation. Oh.

The captain pulls Megan's father's pipe from his suit pocket. He looks the pipe over, hands it to her.

CAPTAIN (CONT'D)
Found this a few minutes ago. Thought you might want it. God knows he loved the damned thing.

Megan takes the pipe. She hugs the captain, cries.

MEGAN
He took my daddy! He took my daddy!

The captain tears-up, too. Megan cries long, hard, steady.

MEGAN (CONT'D)
He took my daddy...

FADE TO BLACK

END FLASHBACK

INT. SUSHI BAR

The current version of Megan is stoic. Mike is stunned.

MIKE
Wow.

MEGAN
Yeah. *Wow*.

There's a long, dreary pause. Mike clears his throat. He motions for the check.

MEGAN (CONT'D)
I can't do the play. It wouldn't be fair to the theatre, or to you, if these vultures come around.

MIKE
Megan, you can do this. You *should* do this. Fuck these people! Make your own world and let 'em hang in the wind, man.

MEGAN
Mike, you have completely no idea. Theresa Clark is a fucking candy cane compared to what's coming. Trust me, I know.

MIKE
What does it help to run? How does that honor your father? Or your mom and sister? Or anybody?

MEGAN
I don't deserve anything happy. I sure as fuck don't deserve to live. I'm alive from a life insurance policy. It makes me fucking sick. But I accept what I am. And you should, too.

With no expression, Megan removes some cash from her bag, tosses it on the table. She gets up, walks away. Mike scrambles, runs after.

EXT. CHICAGO STREETS - NIGHT

Megan grabs her temples in a huff of confused frustration.

Mike comes out, Megan bolts into the street, nearly struck by a motorbike. The rider AD LIBs curses.

MIKE
Megan!

Mike attempts to give chase, but traffic keeps him pinned. He watches as Megan streaks away.

MIKE (CONT'D)
Fuck.

EXT. CHICAGO STREETS - NIGHT

Megan walks through the city, but not with her usual "happily scanning eyes". Instead she sort-of stares forward and down, barely aware of the world.

A CTA city bus approaches a nearby stop, come to a halt. Its doors open to receive a PASSENGER. The bus doors close, the vehicle creeps from the curb. Megan bolts to the bus, bangs the doors. The bus brakes, doors open. She enters.

EXT. CHICAGO - NIGHT

Traveling shot of a dark city.

INT. CHICAGO CITY BUS

The bus concludes its service for the shift, stops in a transfer station. Bright lights from outside and inside flood the scene.

Megan still sits in the back, quasi-oblivious. She stares out her window. An older black man, the BUS DRIVER, secures his wares, walks back to Megan's seat. He scans her, curious.

BUS DRIVER
You been back here all night.

Megan checks her watch.

MEGAN
Two AM. Wow.

BUS DRIVER
You need a cab, or somethin'?

MEGAN
(stands)
No, no. I'll just walk. I'm at The Drake, so it's not so bad.

BUS DRIVER
I walk that way myself. Need some company?

MEGAN
Thanks. That's really sweet, but I need to sort my thoughts.

BUS DRIVER
Been there, too. Well, you take care out there.

EXT. CHICAGO STREETS - NIGHT

Megan walks. She's cold. She continues past buildings, signs, scattered people, cars driving. She thinks.

Finally she sits near a payphone outside a dark pizza shop. She pulls her black and red notepad, scribbles something. As she does, she doesn't notice Mike's car drive by slowly, then stop across the street, because...

At the same time an old pizza delivery car pulls near her, on the street. It stops, the PIZZA DRIVER, 38, exits, walks near Megan, smiles at her. He messes with some keys.

Megan focuses on her writing for a couple beats, when Mike walks up and sits right next to her, two coffees in hand.

MEGAN
(doesn't look)
Nice work, Mr. Holmes.

MIKE
Here.

She stops, looks at him, takes the coffee.

MEGAN
Thanks. You're charming. And resourceful, no less.

MIKE
Mind if I ask about the notebook?

MEGAN
Thoughts and observations. Stuff.

MIKE
Would love to see it sometime.

She puts the notebook away, sips her coffee.

MIKE (CONT'D)
All this stuff you're doing. It's self-inflicted, of course. It's punishment. And, it's totally Goddamned ridiculous.

MEGAN
Oh, really?

MIKE
Really, Megan. Look, we hardly know each other, but I dig you. I did from the minute I saw you sitting there, like you owned the fucking world, or something. I want you to picture this. Picture your dad seeing you now. What would he say?

MEGAN
Heard that before. You could be crossing the line a little, Mike-O.

MIKE
I don't think so. You see, my dad was murdered, too. By my mom. She had problems with mental illness for years. Got worse and worse. One day she mixed *Soma* pills in his coffee. When he went to sleep, she bashed his head with an ashtray. Told the cops he was a British spy.

MEGAN
Wow. I'm really sorry to hear that.

MIKE
Dad was an amazing man, Megan. Gentle. Tough. Sounded a bit like yours. I blamed myself for not being there. I was so fucking busy flying. And I regret it. Every day.

MEGAN
My daddy was killed entirely because I wanted music and fun that night. I can never make that right.

MIKE
Let’s say your dad walked up right now. I think he’d wonder why you’ve destroyed your life over a random event you had zero control over. You don’t deserve this. And your dad wouldn’t want it.

Megan looks at him hard, then looks all around her.

MIKE (CONT’D)
Wait here a sec, I’ll be right back. Don’t you move.

Mike gets up and walks to his car across the street, opens the door, grabs something. Megan thinks, sips coffee. Mike returns with a pink pastry box. He sits, hands it to her.

Megan opens the little box. Inside is a fancy red velvet cupcake with pink frosting, blue star sprinkles, and a little ornate sugar butterfly on top.

Megan stares at it, starts to tremble. She puts the box down, grabs Mike in a hug, starts to cry profusely. Mike holds her, uncertain at first but then caring. His eyes are watering, too. Megan continues to cry.

MIKE (CONT’D)
You’re gonna make it.

They remain embraced. Megan stops crying, pushes gently away from him.

MEGAN
Thank you. For reminding me.
(beat)
I need a cigarette.

MIKE
Go ahead.

MEGAN
Later.

She opens the cupcake box, smiles huge.

MEGAN (CONT’D)
He’s cute.

MIKE
He or she?

MEGAN
He. I’m a she.

MIKE
Fair enough.

MEGAN
I need a day. Lemme go back to my room. I'll come to the loft in a couple days, and we'll put on the best damn Streetcar this town's ever seen.

MIKE
Nice. Love that. You ready?

MEGAN
For...?

MIKE
For me to drive you back?

MEGAN
No. Not that I don't want you to. I just wanna walk. It's not far.

MIKE
Um, it's really late.

MEGAN
I've done a lot crazier things, Mike.
(beat)
I need to honor daddy's life. I wanted to die. I hoped I would, out here. Never really looked at his side of it. Never wanted to. But, I see it now. I really do. So thanks for that. To be continued.

They stand. Megan spreads her arms, and they hug.

MEGAN (CONT'D)
Just one more thing.

She turns his face to hers, gives him a quick but more than superficial kiss.

MEGAN (CONT'D)
Now, off with you. And, with me. Back to the night once more.

MIKE
You sure I can't...?

Megan just shakes her head, walks away backwards.

MEGAN
See ya soon, Sir White Knight.

MIKE
Soon, Mariposa.

She turns and merrily walks off. Mike is pleased.

MIKE (CONT'D)
One thing left to do.

He pulls his phone, dials as he walks back to his car.

MIKE (CONT'D)
Theresa? Mike. Yeah, it's late. But I think you'll wanna hear this.

EXT. CHICAGO STREETS - NIGHT

Megan smiles as she continues down the sidewalk. She looks up at the sky, spins around a couple of times. She watches a car drive by, marveling at its headlights. She looks into nighted store windows. She's happy.

She sees an alley shortcut, walks that way. The Drake frontage is a couple blocks from here. She stops and considers the alley.

She walks into the alley, dark and narrow. A sliver of light falls from a window, paints a mark on the ground. She walks over, stands in it, feels it. Tears well in her eyes. She smiles, looks up.

MEGAN
I love you, daddy.

Unintelligible voices O.S. catch her attention. She listens briefly, but yawns and continues. The O.S. voices finally pique her interest, so she navigates.

She approaches a retainer wall. A fire burns on the opposite side, out of view. Defined shadows of dancing FIGURES beam into the alley from behind the retainer wall. Megan smiles, sits, watches the primordial "show".

A bottle breaks. The firelight suddenly brightens and spreads as the metal drum in which it was built violently slams to the ground. Embers and burning debris softly explode into the alley. Fighting figures emerge.

Three white METH THUGS beating senseless a black man. Little fires burn all over, dotting the scene like angry stars.

The man rolls groggily in some of the fires as he tries to escape his assailants. But the Thugs apply their final touch, and the man passes out, knocked cold from a left kick by Meth Thug #1.

The man rolls over, his face now lit by a burning board: It's the CTA bus driver.

Meth Thugs #2 and #3 move immediately upon the driver, rifle his pockets. Megan is horrified. Her chagrin turns to rage, and she pops from the dark to deal with the situation.

MEGAN (CONT'D)
Get away from him!

All three Meth Thugs turn to face their judge. They're amused, spread out around her like pack animals.

MEGAN (CONT'D)
He's a good man. He doesn't have anything you need. Just let him go.

Meth Thug #1 steps forward, stands face to face with Megan. She doesn't flinch. He knocks the cupcake box out of her hand. Hard. She's aghast, but defiantly turns to retrieve the box. The Thugs follow.

SCENE PLAYS MOSTLY AS SHADOWS.

The shadows reveal struggle. Megan is brutally attacked. She fights, but the sound and imagery is shocking. Over and over and over she's kicked and punched.

We hear her vomit.

During this, the O.S. sound of an engine approaches. And then headlights as the pizza vehicle from previous wheels in.

Meth Thugs bolt the scene. Meth Thug #1 stumbles away with pants around ankles. Clearly, Megan was close to rape.

The pizza vehicle brakes to a stop, the former delivery driver runs to Megan, examines her in the light of his headlamps. He also sees the bus driver.

We do not see Megan.

BAKERY DRIVER
Good God.

The pizza driver fumbles for his cellphone, his hands covered in blood. Trembling, he dials 9-1-1.

INT. HOSPITAL CORRIDORS

White walls and flashes of HOSPITAL PERSONNEL blur by as a critically battered Megan is pushed to surgery. Her eyes are smashed and swollen shut, her face isn't much better. Part of her hair is torn-out, showing bloodied scalp. She's nearly beyond recognition.

ER NURSES hold IVs as they run with Megan's gurney.

FADE TO BLACK

Three beats, then...

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - AFTERNOON

MEGAN'S POV: On and off blurry. A sparsely furnished, private hospital room, as seen from her eyes.

At Megan's right is Marcia, haggard, stressed, concerned. A SPECIALIST stands at the foot of Megan's bed. Marcia suddenly notices that Megan is awake.

MARCIA
Lysa?

SPECIALIST
Lysa? Can you hear us?

Megan doesn't respond. Her POV wanders the room.

MARCIA
Lysa, can you see me?

Megan's POV goes to complete blur...

MARCIA (V.O.)
Lysa?

FADE TO BLACK

Three beats...

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

MEGAN'S POV: The specialist and another PHD have a look at Megan's files. Neither notice Megan's observation.

SPECIALIST
I know, Frank, but there's no internal damage at all.

PHD
Then we wait.
(beat)
Nip-n-tuck did a hell of a job on her face, I must say.

SPECIALIST
Yeah. Want a coffee?

PHD
Sure.

FADE TO BLACK

Three beats...

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAWN

MEGAN'S POV: Megan opens her eyes in time to see a NURSE pulling the blinds. Light of morning blasts the room. The nurse turns, sees Megan observing her. She immediately goes to a phone, picks up, dials.

NURSE
Doctor? She's awake. No, she's just looking around.

MEGAN
(very weak)
Mom?

NURSE
She's talking, doctor. Yes. I will.
(hangs up)
Well hello, Ms. Manning. Looks like it's going to be a beautiful day.

MEGAN
Where...? Where am I?

NURSE
This is University Medical. In Cincinnati. You're home.

MEGAN
What...what happened to the bus driver? He was hurt, and——

NURSE
You just rest.

On that, the specialist from previous walks in. He does a quick awareness exam, smiles.

SPECIALIST
Welcome back, Lysa.

The Specialist leans toward the nurse.

SPECIALIST (CONT'D)
Call her mother, will you?
(to Megan)
You've had a bit of a nap.

MEGAN
Nap?

SPECIALIST
Well, you've been asleep for three months. And a few odd days. But I think you're going to be just fine.

FADE TO BLACK

EXT. LANDSCAPE THEATRE - DAY - ESTABLISHING

A poster shows "You Can't Take It With You" upcoming.

INT. LANDSCAPE LIGHT BOOTH

View from here shows the barely lit and deserted stage. A phone rings in the emptiness, answering machine picks up.

MIKE'S VOICE
Thank you for calling the Landscape Theatre office. We're not here but we'll be back. Please tell us something amazing. Cheers.

BEEP.

MEGAN (V.O.)
Hi, it's Megan, aka Lysa. Calling for Mike. How are you, Mike? Long time no talk. Well, I couldn't actually *talk* for a long time. Jaw had wires. I'm home now, in Cincinnati. I'm truly sorry about the vanishing act. I know it's been four months, but I'd like to explain. In person.

On this, we see Mike enter from the stage-left outside door. Sunlight streams, he pockets the keys he used to get in.

MEGAN (V.O.)
Please call me? We have a lot to talk about. Call me. Please.

Mike hears this, dashes to the light booth. Will he make it?

MEGAN
I have a cell phone now. It's fancy. Has games and all kinds of stuff on it. Man, I sound lame. Anyway, call me. My number——

Mike enters the light booth, races to the phone, picks it up, eyes wild.

MIKE
Megan?! Jesus Christ.
(beat)
Ghosting me like you did. Wow, that's soon. No, no, no, I'm cool with it. Which flight? Got it. Now, let's hear what happened that night. I've really, really missed you. Okay, I'll sit.

He does.

EXT. O'HARE RUNWAY - DAY

A 777 lands smoothly.

INT. O'HARE

Bustling crowds and long corridors.

And there's Megan, but she looks quite a bit different, noticeably more muscular ala Linda Hamilton. Her hair is completely gone. She wears a thin silver and gold headband, looks very majestic. Her makeup is awesome, as always, as are her clothes and carry-on.

And, the scars: There are several on her face, along the line of her mouth and around her chin. Strangely, they work with her features. Not dramatic.

On the left-bottom side of her skull is a grafted spot where her hair was torn out by the Thugs. It looks clean, but the skin doesn't quite match.

In any case, she's happy, confident, stunning.

INT. LANDSCAPE TECH BOOTH - AFTERNOON

A couple THEATRE TECHS monitor the light board. Danny's here as well. A tech rehearsal is underway.

Mike enters the b.g., walks toward the guys, observes the action on the stage all the while. He's positively intense, checks what's happening AD LIB against his George S. Kaufman/ Moss Hart "You Can't Take It With You" script. He nods.

MIKE
Looks great. Alright then, I'm gonna head out for a while.

Danny motions with his head the direction of the booth's corner. Sitting there, in near dark, is Megan. She leans forward, catches a smear of light. She smiles.

Mike's eyes widen. She stands, comes to him. They just look at each other a long while. Then they embrace. For a long time. Megan pushes him gently away.

MEGAN
I know you saw me on the phone video thing, but...how do I look in person?

DANNY
Fuckin' gorgeous?

MIKE
Thanks, Danny. And, agreed.

MEGAN
I'm growing my hair back, by the way. Fresh start.

DANNY
Can't wait to see what you do with it, luv.

Mike touches her scars. She turns her head, shows him the scalp wound. He touches that, too. She turns back.

MIKE
We gotta get to the airport.

DANNY
"Daredevil Mike" alert.

MEGAN
Daredevil Mike?

MIKE
Bah. C’mon.

They leave.

EXT. SKIES ABOVE INDIANA - DAY

A 2027 Cessna Turbo Stationair HD six-seater makes flight through clouds and sunshine, patchwork farms and towns below.

INT. CESSNA

Mike pilots the Cessna while Megan, his passenger, stares out her window in total rapture. Both wear headsets.

Mike gets a playful look, rocks the plane a little. Megan looks over, briefly shocked, and then sees Mike’s grin. She slugs him on the shoulder, smiling.

MIKE
Ow!

Megan goes back to her scan.

MIKE (CONT’D)
Hey. Hold on. Ready?

Megan is unsure, but sure. Mike banks the plane easy but hard. Megan’s eyes widen. It’s a beautiful move, with the plane almost sideways. He levels out.

MIKE (CONT’D)
See? Nothin’ to it.

Megan smiles.

EXT. GARY AIRFIELD - DAY

Mike’s Cessna drops from the sky to a perfect landing. It wheels off the tarmac to a stop near some hangars.

INT. CESSNA

Mike shuts everything down, remains belted. Megan detaches her harness and headset, bodily turns herself toward him.

MEGAN
That was so, so cool.

MIKE
(detaching harness)
Tight for a six-seater, right? You hungry?

MEGAN
Always.

Mike motions for them to debark.

EXT. TARMAC/HANGAR

Mike and Megan exit, Megan runs her hands down the Cessna fuselage. When done she turns to Mike, grabs his hands.

MEGAN
You waited for me.

MIKE
Yes and no.

MEGAN
Yeah? Listen, there's something I've wanted to know. Just didn't wanna bring it up.

MIKE
Go.

MEGAN
Why didn't Theresa ever run that story? Not a peep. Nothing. How is that possible?

MIKE
Well, I called her. Talked it over.

MEGAN
Seriously?

MIKE
Theresa has major corporate ambition. I know her very well, Megan. In fact, I know some things that could eliminate any chance she's ever had at a future CEO slot, or whatever. I simply reminded her. And that was that.

MEGAN
Extortion?

MIKE
Insurance.

MEGAN
I see.

They walk into the hangar.

MIKE
So, now what? Apart from dinner.

MEGAN
Now, we talk.

Megan rummages her bag, pulls her black and red notebook. She hands it to him. Mike opens. There's a handwritten title page: "Mariposa: A Theatre Play by Lysa Manning, aka Megan."

MIKE
My, my. You really are somethin'.

MEGAN
I know.

They laugh.

MIKE
Seriously, though.

MEGAN
Mike, I don't know what I am. Or who. I'm really another person after all this. I don't know.

MIKE
"Mariposa," huh? We've got work to do. When the new one is done. Not too long.

MEGAN
Excellent. Is there something I can do for you now, though? Backstage? Maybe props?

MIKE
You would do that?

She kisses him. And, they kiss. And kiss.

Hand-in-hand, they exit.

END.